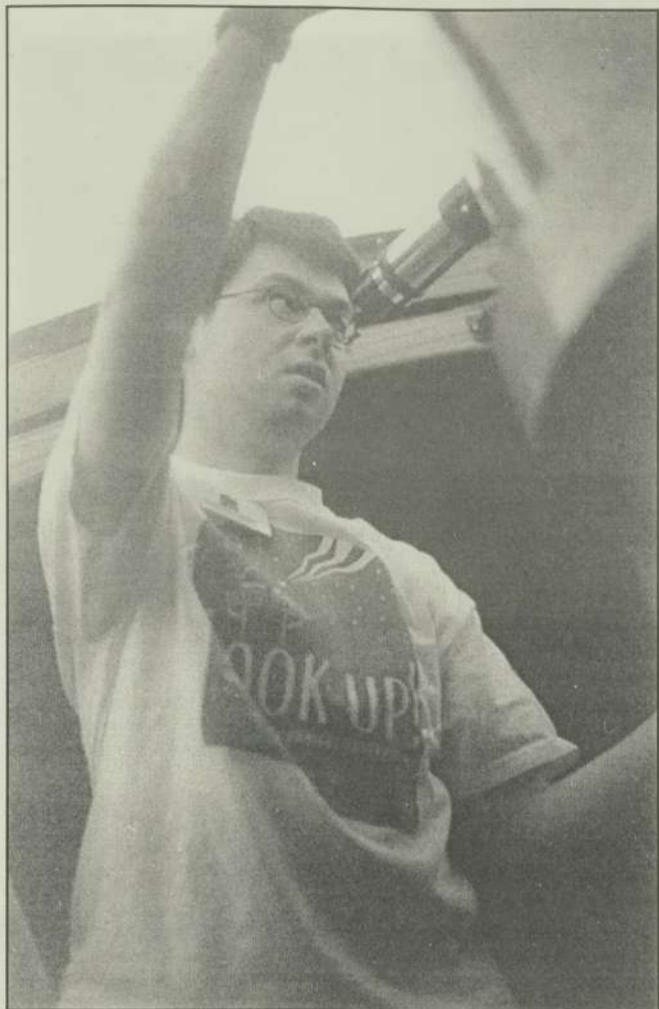


Astronomy Week gives campus new outlook



ELISABETH MEYER / Clackamas Print

Volunteer Justin McCollum brings the moon into view during Saturday's tour of the Haggart Observatory. "One thing about being the operator of a Newtonian scope is you have to have a lot of patience," he said. "There's no buttons for you to push; you have to do it all by hand." McCollum, a physics student at Portland State University, dedicated many nights last week to operating the telescope for visitors.

ELISABETH MEYER
Feature Editor

Last week's festivities for Astronomy Week didn't draw big crowds, but astronomy instructor James Dickinson is still excited about exposing new audiences to the lure of the skies.

The week's events (April 13-20), which included daily tours of the observatory and astronomy talks, were sparsely attended due to weather, said Dickinson.

"I gave away about 600 flyers (in the Community Center), so obviously more people were interested than could come," he said. "The problem was every night looked like rain. But for a rainy week, there were pretty good numbers."

Although every night was at least a little cloudy, The Haggart Observatory's famously dedicated volunteers showed visitors the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, Venus, and the moon through breaks in the clouds.

This is the first time the college has celebrated Astronomy Week in any staff member's memory, said Dickinson. "And before, we had only done Astronomy Day, but we didn't want to bet on just one day being nice this time."

On Saturday night, volunteers Donny Miller and Justin McCollum helped several youngsters and their parents see the skies through the telescope. Desiree Bergstrom, four, looked at

the moon through the scope and told her mother Annette, "It's so cool, Mama!"

Six-year-old Andy Schinn exclaimed, "Oh my gosh, I see (the moon) lighter! I see it better than it was. After this, can we look at other weird stuff?"

His mother, Sharon Schinn, was also impressed by the telescope. "I didn't even know this was here," she said.

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James Dickinson
Astronomy Instructor

The Schinns aren't alone, said Dickinson. First-time visitors comprise most of the guest list at publicized events. In contrast, the volunteers who run the observatory put in countless hours just in case someone wants to drop by on a clear Saturday night.

"Have you ever been to a really good restaurant and wondered why the tables are empty?" Dickinson asked. "That's how the observatory is. I'm amazed that people don't make time for something that is so convenient. It's the

only observatory for hundreds of miles, and you can go on your way to the grocery store. And yet every other person I poke tells me they've never heard about it."

"People are lining up in California to see Star Wars II," Dickinson pointed out. "What dumbfounds me is that people aren't lining up to see the coolest thing in Clackamas County."

Dickinson hopes events like Astronomy Week and the fall term celebration raise the community's awareness of the scope's existence. Then, he said, people will realize they need to care about the world they live in. "You can drive your SUV all you want," he said. "But if you look up, you realize that what you do doesn't just affect you."

The new astronomy club should help to promote awareness, too. The Amateur Astronomers of Clackamas Community College meet every clear Saturday night in the Haggart Observatory and club members can choose to volunteer at the observatory.

"There's basically no other place where you can come with so little experience to see the stars," said Dickinson "You just have to show up and be willing to learn."

"We're just full of potential," Dickinson said. "There are plenty of astronomy classes, plenty of volunteer opportunities, and plenty of sky to look up at."

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