



## AURA Observatories in Chile: Friend of the Teletón

*Hugo Ochoa & David Orellana*

The Teletón is a Chilean charity that provides rehabilitation for handicapped children and young people from toddler age to 24 years old. It operates 10 centers throughout Chile, including one in Coquimbo, which together provide assistance to more than 26,000 children.



The Teletón drew a large, lively crowd.

Funds to operate these centers, and build more, are obtained through an annual campaign. This campaign culminates with a 27-hour-long television marathon (hence the name Teletón) in late November, with the participation of national and international celebrities. Donations are made by diverse companies and organizations, but by far the majority of the funds raised each year come from contributions made by individuals.

The opening event for this year's campaign was held in La Serena's Parque Pedro de Valdivia on August 23. For the first time, this event featured a series of workshops in which the handicapped children themselves took part, each accompanied by a volunteer "friend" of similar age. This activity had the goal of helping build the children's self esteem and independence, motivating them to become more integrated in society, while increasing public awareness of the obstacles to such integration.

One of these workshops, titled "AURA Astronomy: A Friend of the Teletón" was run by the AURA Observatories in Chile, with the collaboration of several members of the scientific and outreach staff of Gemini South, NOAO South, SOAR, the Centro de Apoyo a la Didáctica de la Astronomía (CADIAS), and volunteers from the Star Teachers program.



SOAR Director Steve Heathcote and some of the attendees.



Kids of all kinds got to experience a little bit of astronomy, including the use of binoculars and a solar telescope.

Over the course of the day, five groups, each consisting of 12 handicapped children plus their 12 volunteer friends, were given a tour of the solar system in one of the mobile planetaria. The participants then built a scale model of the Earth-Moon system from modeling clay.

The enthusiasm and energy of the children was infectious, and everyone had a great time. All of us—children and grownups alike—learned something from the experience. This new knowledge, and the obvious joy and gratitude of the children from the Teletón, amply repaid the effort involved.

# Students Needed for the 2009 REU Program at Kitt Peak

*Ken Mighell*



Each summer, a group of talented college students comes to Tucson to participate in astronomical research at Kitt Peak National Observatory (KPNO) under the sponsorship of the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Program. Like the parallel program at Cerro Tololo, the KPNO REU program provides

an exceptional opportunity for undergraduates considering a career in science to engage in substantive research activities with scientists working in the forefront of contemporary astrophysics.

Each REU student is hired as a full-time research assistant to work with one or more staff members on specific aspects of major, on-going research projects at NOAO. These undergraduates gain observational experience with KPNO telescopes and develop expertise in astronomical data reduction and analysis as part of their research activities. They also take part in a weekly lecture series and a field trip to New Mexico to visit the National Solar Observatory at Sacramento Peak and the Very Large Array in Socorro.

At the end of the summer, the students share their results with the Tucson astronomical community in oral presentations. As part of their internship experience, all six of our 2008 REU participants will present posters describing their astronomical research projects at the January 2009 American Astronomical Society meeting in Long Beach, California.

We anticipate being able to support six REU positions during the summer of 2009. Student participants must be citizens or permanent residents of the United States to meet NSF requirements.

The KPNO REU positions are full-time for 10–12 weeks between June and September, with a preferred starting date of early June. The salary is \$625 per week, with additional funds provided to cover travel to and from Tucson. Further information about the KPNO REU 2009



The KPNO REU 2007 students. Top: Timothy Arnold (Ohio State University), Taylor Chonis (University of Nebraska, Lincoln), and Matthew Henderson (Clemson University). Bottom: Matthew Zagursky (University of Maryland), Tiffany Meshkat (University of California, Los Angeles), and Ashley Stewart (University of Arkansas).

program, including the online application form, can be found at [www.noao.edu/kpno/reu](http://www.noao.edu/kpno/reu). Completed applications (including official transcripts and at least two letters of recommendation) must be submitted to KPNO no later than Friday, 30 January 2009.

# Observatory Open House Welcomes Members of the Tohono O'odham Nation

*Douglas Isbell & Buell T. Jannuzi*

The observatories on Kitt Peak hosted a record turnout of over 1,000 guests during an observatory open house for members of the Tohono O'odham Nation held on 13 September 2008. Beautiful weather, excellent pre-event planning, effective advertising, and hard work during and after the day by many people contributed to the great success of the event.



Held every few years, our open houses are a chance for members of the Tohono O'odham Nation to tour mountain facilities, view the Sun and the night sky through some of the telescopes we operate, meet our staff, and learn about what we do to support astronomical research and education. The open houses also give our staff a chance to learn more about the Tohono O'odham people and their culture.

Coordinated by Nanette Bird, the volunteer-driven event staff drew participants from KPNO, NSO, the Kitt Peak Visitor Center and its docent cadre, WIYN Observatory, Steward Observatory, and volunteers from several

other divisions of NOAO. Other important contributors included the Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association, officers from the Nation's Department of Public Safety, emergency medical technicians from Indian Health Services, the Bureau of Indian Education, Grey Line Bus Company, and the University of Arizona CatTran shuttle service.



We appreciate the participation of Earleen Patricio (Miss Tohono O'odham Nation 2008 and now Miss Indian Arizona 2008), the Valenzuela & Company Band, the San Xavier Basket Dancers, the Indian Oasis Dance School, and food and craft vendors from around the Nation. They added significantly to the spirit and value of the evening. We are grateful for assistance in the planning and support of the open house from the Schuk Toak District Council, District Chairwoman Phyllis Juan, District Vice Chairwoman Denise Flores, and the Tohono O'odham Executive Office. We thank *The Runner* newspaper, KOHN FM 91.9 radio, Indian Oasis-Baboquivari School District, Santa Rosa Boarding School, San Simon Elementary School, and all eleven District Offices for their assistance advertising the event.

Our staff and volunteers were well organized and very creative in handling the steady large flow of guests, who were uniformly patient, enthusiastic, and interested both in our work and the larger world of astronomy. Even with the overflow turnout (we were parking cars in all the pull-outs after filling up the picnic grounds—not including the three busloads of visitors), our planned events went smoothly, and we managed to get our last guest safely headed down the mountain by 10:00 p.m. Color photos from the open house later graced the cover of the next edition of *The Runner* (see figures).



It was the support of the Tohono O'odham Nation 50 years ago that enabled the National Science Foundation to establish a national observatory for optical and infrared ground-based astronomy. Kitt Peak open houses are part of our broader efforts to maintain and develop the relationship between the national observatory and the people of the Tohono O'odham Nation, from whose sacred land we are fortunate to study the Universe. We thank everyone that helped make the September 2008 open house a success.

## Dragon\*Con 2008 Attendees Get Excited about IYA2009



Members of the US team helping to plan the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) garnered an enthusiastic reception at Dragon\*Con 2008 in Atlanta over Labor Day weekend. Thanks largely to strong advance planning by US IYA2009 Web Developer and New Media team leader Pamela Gay (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville), the IYA2009 exhibit booth had a great location that drew a steady stream of interested visitors for all four days of the meeting.

Staff at the booth included Pamela Gay, Phil Plait (*Bad Astronomy* Web site and the James Randi Educational Foundation), US IYA2009 Single-Point-of-Contact Doug Isbell (NOAO), and local friends and volunteers from the Skeptics Society. The team handed out thousands of US IYA2009 buttons and informational postcards, and talked with hundreds of attendees. The typical reaction? “Cool!” “Awesome.” “I love astronomy!”

Astronomer Bill Keel (University of Alabama) conducted remote telescope observations on several nights in the name of IYA2009, which were greatly appreciated and extremely popular. IYA2009 was mentioned in numerous Dragon\*Con sessions in the space, podcasting, and skeptics tracks at the meeting, which drew an estimated 60,000 passionate fans of science fiction, fantasy, comics, futurism, and science reality.

The accompanying photos show a few of the booth visitors and new supporters of IYA2009 who emerged at the 2008 meeting. The US IYA2009 group plans to be back at Dragon\*Con in September 2009 with even more creative activities.