

Island Astronomy
Institute

OBSERVER

Fall 2005

The Island Astronomy Institute is on the move. In December we will say farewell to our beautiful location on Bass Harbor. Despite the support of the building's owner, Irving Silverman, the Board of Directors has elected not to exercise our \$10,000 lease option for 2006. The Board determined our limited resources could no longer support the rent commanded by this scenic location. As a result we are hard at work on our long-term plans for an astronomy park and science center. Our search for land for our new home is already receiving support. The Stanley Grierson Nature Foundation headed by Scott Grierson has offered to share the use of a nature center being planned for a site near the Acadia National Park boundary on Route 102A, between Seawall and the Bass Harbor Lighthouse.

While funding and detailed plans for the Grierson center are developed, the Institute will have use of 2-1/2 acres of land situated across the street from the Nature Foundation site. The temporary site offers an open dark sky and public accessibility, located just minutes from two campgrounds, Ships Harbor & Wonderland nature trails, and Bass Harbor Light. To get us going, the Grierson Foundation is providing a temporary building for storage of equipment and telescopes.

Working closely with Advisory Board Member Steve Pappas, we are providing the 2006 "Night Sky" column for Out & About Magazine published by the Ellsworth American. These five columns will promote astronomy throughout the region, while directing the public to the Institute's programs at our new location.

Each year as our summer visitors depart we turn our attention back to our local schools. Our Pemetec program in Southwest Harbor is now in its third year. The Maine Space Grant Consortium has extended the term of the \$10,000 one-year Pemetec grant to include the current academic year. The extension allows us to complete the grant's revision phase and perfect the programs provided directly to the school's students by the Institute. Our work at Pemetec this year is supported by a second \$2000 Emery Grant, administered by the Maine Communities Foundation.

Our fall fundraising efforts are sensitive to the pressing humanitarian demands of the Katrina disaster. As a result our portable planetarium program is not yet fully funded. Despite this, word of mouth created by the Pemetec program is generating demand in local schools. We initiated a curriculum development project at the Tremont Elementary School, integrating astronomy, with math and history. We also visited the Islesford School and are preparing to reach even more schools through the College of The Atlantic.

The Educational Studies Department at COA hosted a professional development seminar for teachers through the Down East Educational Partnership (DEEP). The COA seminar allowed us to present the curriculum developed at Pemetec to regional teachers. Beyond this, we are advising Educational Studies senior Emily Blazek. Emily's independent study project features a high school solar observing project, using a telescope donated to the Institute by Orion Telescopes. And finally, we are working with COA to add an introductory Astronomy course to their offerings some time next year.

In only one year, our membership has grown to over 65 enthusiastic supporters. So far this year, Board Member, Dwight Lanpher has organized 3 star parties and planned a Mars Observing Night in Bar Harbor on October 29th. Sadly, we said goodbye to Board Member Jeff Wright, who left MDI to pursue professional opportunities. We are pleased to announce that Jim Snow of Southwest Harbor has joined our Board. Jim is a Certified Public Accountant and brings invaluable business skills to our young organization

Jim is helping us complete the transition from a privately owned LLC to a nonprofit Institute. A major component of this transition involves the transfer of sales inventory at the conclusion of 2005. In 2006 sales of books and accessories, telescopes, binoculars and spotting scopes will directly support the work of the Institute. As if all this was not news enough, we are hard at work on a project that perfectly demonstrates concepts for an astronomy park and gardens. This private commission fully embodies the Institute's mission to promote astronomy as a cultural activity.

The Institute has been retained to design a remarkable combination of landscape architecture and astronomy. The project infuses historically accurate symbols into landscape design; blending a classically inspired labyrinth, with an astronomically correct stone circle. Set in a spectacular seaside setting, the project provides a dramatic new way to move astronomy into the real world.

On behalf of my fellow Board Members, we thank you for your support.

Peter Lord
President