

Island Astronomy
Institute

OBSERVER

Spring 2006

This spring we are pleased to welcome Ruth Grierson to our Board of Directors. Ruth has been a loyal supporter right from the start and we are honored by her willingness to become even more involved. Not one to waste time, she's forging new links within our community. Ruth's son Scott, hopes to break ground this summer for the Stanley Grierson Nature Foundation to be located in Bass Harbor. We have been invited to share space at the foundation, for as long as it takes us to create a home of our own. I will be sharing our first glimpse of such a home as I end this newsletter.

Our new "Philosophy of Astronomy" course, offered this term at the College of the Atlantic, is made possible in part, by funding from the Maine Space Grant Consortium. The grant established a collaboration between the Island Astronomy Institute and COA. The grant partially funds our new course, library books, a teaching assistant, a summer internship, and planning for future Educational Studies projects. The new course contrasts Galileo's telescopic evidence of a moving earth with our everyday experience of an immobile planet at our feet. Our philosophical approach to this historic shift in perspective leads students to actually feel the earth move under their feet. This unique approach is based on research into the failure to achieve widespread science literacy in traditional classes. We abandon facts and figures, to challenge students to delve deeply into their daily experience of life on earth, directly confronting the issues raised by Galileo as he promoted the earth's motion.

At the invitation of the Dorr Museum Director, Lynn Haversall, we participated in COA's Earth Day celebration, with a light pollution display. It was an opportunity to gauge interest in measuring the region's night sky with new hand held sky quality meters. Due to the response we received, we are discussing a project with the National Park Service's Dark Sky Team. Our goal is to raise public awareness of the growing impact of light pollution on Mount Desert Island, through coordinated volunteer measurements.

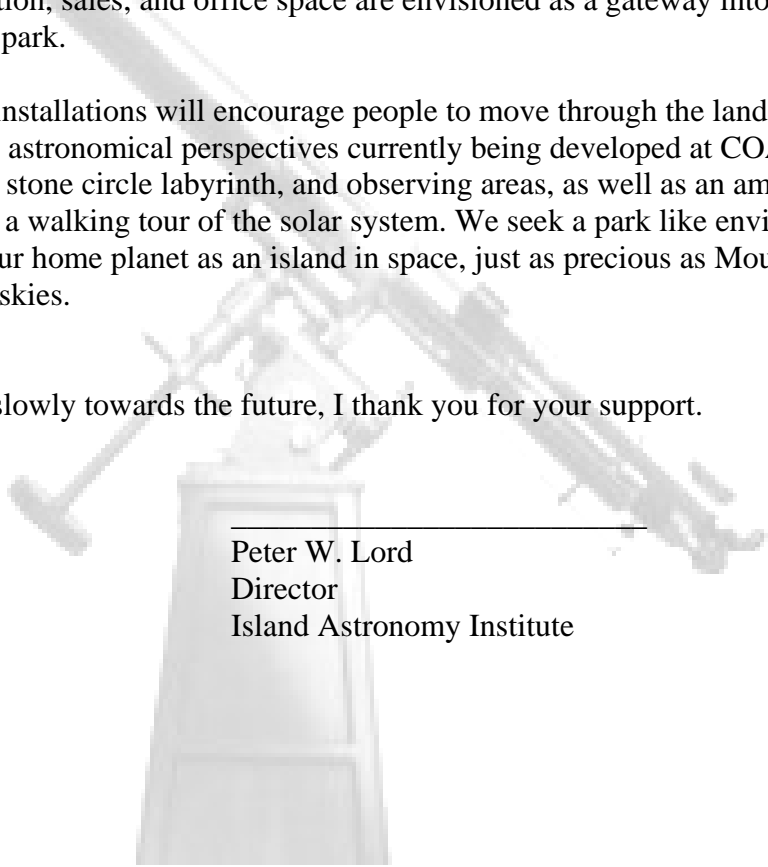
Our summer calendar of events is growing rapidly. We are planning for three summer star parties, several special group events, and a series of lectures at the Bass Harbor Memorial Library. Keep an eye on our website www.islandastro.org, local papers and the Night Sky column in Out & About Magazine for schedule details.

As this issue is being printed, we await our Final Determination letter from the IRS. As a Maine incorporated non-profit, donations to the Institute enjoy full tax exempt status. Now that we have established the required financial history and filed our 501c3 application, we are poised to take on even bigger plans.

This winter, Bar Harbor architect Roc Caivano worked with our Board to propose an inspiring home for the Institute; one that sheds new light on the concept of Island Astronomy. His design invites the pattern of the seasons to walk their way through the floor plan. The multi-sided central gallery is a modern Stonehenge featuring walls that face south as well as toward the sunrise and sunsets of solstice and equinox. The building's presentation, sales, and office space are envisioned as a gateway into an outdoor astronomy park.

The park's installations will encourage people to move through the landscape as they experience the astronomical perspectives currently being developed at COA. Sundials, orrerys, a stone circle labyrinth, and observing areas, as well as an amphitheater would be linked by a walking tour of the solar system. We seek a park like environment shedding light on our home planet as an island in space, just as precious as Mount Desert Island under starry skies.

As we make haste slowly towards the future, I thank you for your support.



Peter W. Lord
Director
Island Astronomy Institute