

Island Astronomy  
Institute

# OBSERVER

Summer/Fall 2006

This summer brought both a painful setback and a protracted delay for the Institute. Our plan for a public location failed to materialize, and we lost a wonderful place in which to gather. My sincere apologies go to those who sought us out in Bernard. Even though we had met the IRS requirements for a 501(c) 3 corporation by the end of 2005, and had filed our 1023 Application in January of 2006, the application has remained in the IRS's "unassigned inventory". While we remain a fully complaint non-profit, we can not provide the IRS Determination Letter virtually all major institutions, including the National Park Service and Friends of Acadia insist upon to extend funding. Our application is behind a flood of "high priority" disaster relief non-profits generated by Hurricane Katrina.

On a more positive note, this summer's Friday morning light pollution brain storming sessions with Board Member David Westphal, proved the value of perseverance. David's chance encounter with the Acting Director of Friends of Acadia (FOA), lead to an invitation to write "Of Starlight and Curiosity", a featured article in this fall's Friends of Acadia Journal. Preparing this article, lead to a series of productive meetings with Acadia National Park Planner, John Kelly.

We are working with John to design a project to measure, promote, and protect the dark skies over MDI. With a clear IRS ruling, and a signed cooperative agreement from the Park, a door will open to long-term funding for this multi-year campaign.

Many factors make light pollution an issue who's time has come. Just as naturally dark skies are disappearing across the United States, dark sky protection is becoming a smart economic move. There is a growing selection of money saving dark sky fixtures available to municipalities adopting dark sky practices. Our first goal is to establish just how much light is being directed into our skies though a joint measurement campaign.

John Kelly and I recently met with FOA President, John Courtin and his staff, to gauge FOA's interest in supporting a proposed collaboration. I am very pleased to announce that both Acadia National Park and as a direct result FOA, will be adding preserving our night skies to their list of working priorities for next year.

While the details remain to be worked out; we can anticipate a multi-year project and a formal collaborative agreement with Acadia National Park. All dependent on our letter from the IRS...

As we wait, Chad Moore, Manager of the National Park Service's Night Sky Team, will be visiting Acadia this fall to collect data on Cadillac. Prior to Chad's visit, I will be using our own low cost Sky Quality Meter to collect data on Cadillac for comparison.

A second doorway was opened by Board Member, Dwight Lanpher when he became aware of Learning Technologies Inc.'s, Digital Starlab Planetarium, a remarkable new system developed by a National Science Foundation grant. The Digital Starlab features an inflatable dome that one person can carry and set up in only 15 minutes. Thanks to Dwight, I test drove a Digital Starlab across the universe. I kid you not!

It is now possible to lift a class of students from the surface of the earth, fly to the moon, the planets, then off into the galaxies beyond; all from a gymnasium floor. The illusion of movement created by the 360° image can make you space-sick. This is no passive sleep inducing sky show. Advanced students can run the planetarium's software on their own computers, then save their work to be presented in the dome. This new planetarium format will be the focus of future grant proposals and fundraising efforts, once we have our letter.

The perseverance of our Board has transformed an otherwise painful summer into unexpected opportunities. With a bit of effort, our letter from the IRS, and your support, who knows what wonders await us as we explore these new doorways?

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Peter W. Lord  
Director  
Island Astronomy Institute