

SKY'S THE LIMIT

OBSERVATORY AND NATURE CENTER TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA



VOL II NO 1

The Ceremony of Blessing the Land and Breaking Ground

With a deep respect for the land and the environment, SKY'S THE LIMIT gathered the Morongo Basin communities to initiate the Observatory and Nature Center with a unique ceremony on Sunday, September 30, 2007.

Over 200 people of all ages met at the Joshua Tree National Park Oasis Visitor Center, received their souvenir gifts, and were shuttled to the Observatory site on vans provided by the City of Twentynine Palms, the Town of Yucca Valley, and Reach Out Morongo Basin.

The United States Marine Corps Color Guard opened the program with presentation of Colors and playing of the National Anthem.

Joshua Tree National Park Superintendent Curt Sauer and his wife Connor Sauer shared the Master of Ceremonies role, leading the day's events with grace and dignity. They noted the profound symbolism of the Observatory and Nature Center as a place drawing together all ages and cultures, acknowledging the past and anticipating the future, making knowledge accessible to everyone seeking to experience and to learn.

The Twentynine Palms Band of Mission Indians has a long ancestral history in this basin and on this particular ground. Joe Benitez, a Chemehuevi Elder, was asked to bless the land out of respect for its past and in preparation for its future use.

Turning the first shovels were avid stargazers young and old. Over 25 students represented all Morongo Basin schools. Betty Sleeth, age 92, was invited to represent lifelong learners and lovers of the night sky.

Hopefully, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these students will still be able to gaze in wonder at a breathtaking celestial display, and experience the awesome beauty of a pristine desert landscape.



The first human construct on the ten-acre campus was dedicated by renowned sculptor, Simi Dabah. It is one of six works that the artist has given to the Observatory and Nature Center.

The form is strongly symbolic of the mission of SKY'S THE LIMIT: Planted on the land, reaching for the sky; forming a bridge between art, science, and nature.

To close the ceremony, Connor Sauer read *Precious Commonplaces*, a poem by Susan Luckie Reilly, which referred to the "endless depths of star-strewn nights." The author, a long-time local resident and passionate environmental advocate, made a gift of her poem to SKY'S THE LIMIT, in support of the project's devotion to preserving the desert's most precious resources.

"When a team of dedicated individuals makes a commitment to act as one . . . the sky's the limit."

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Watch for the upcoming publication of *Native Plants of Sky's The Limit Campus*

an illustrated guide featuring original botanical drawings by Morongo Basin artists. Annotated with cultural and medicinal lore, this book will foster appreciation of the beauty as well as the historical and ecological significance of desert flora and encourage its conservation.

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WINTER 2007



Bill Truesdale (retired JTNP Botanist, left) volunteered to identify significant plants in areas to be graded. Bill Souder and Tom Haworth assisted in their relocation to safe territory along accessible Nature Trails.

You Can Help Build the Dream: Be A Volunteer!

SKY'S THE LIMIT has grown from a casual remark into the strong community-based organization it is today, through countless generous contributions – large and small – of funds and materials, and (equally importantly) of time and talent.

Basin Wide Foundation laid the groundwork for the organization. The City of Twentynine Palms provided strategic support for the project. Then organizations, businesses, and individuals donated their efforts, working together to arrive at a groundbreaking.

Now the ceremonies are over, Phase I begins. Lots of good, hard work will be required to build the Information Center, Workshop, and Ramada for gatherings, and to level the ground for the Sun Circle, Orrery, and amateur telescope pads. Some jobs will require specialized skills, but other tasks can be accomplished by anyone willing to help. Join in! You'll have a lot of fun and make an important contribution to the future.

SKY'S THE LIMIT

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Please contact us if you would like to arrange for a representative of SKY'S THE LIMIT to speak to your organization. Our ambassadors can address a variety of topics, from very general to very technical, and can tailor the presentation to be interesting and exciting for people of any age.

Mission Statement

SKY'S THE LIMIT is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing hands-on learning opportunities for the people of and visitors to the Morongo Basin.

SKY'S THE LIMIT provides a place where the honest pursuit of knowledge enriches the lives of all willing to participate, whether to view the smallest objects on the Earth, or observe the colossal displays in the sky.

PRECIOUS COMMONPLACES

**What are life's treasures, held most dear?
To me, they come through eye and ear:**

**The mountain's cloud-veiled majesty,
The roar of pounding seas;
The glory of a sunset sky,
The whisper of the breeze.**

**The whirl of southward wending wings
Before the silent pristine snows;
The touch of spring renewing, then,
The brief enchantment of the rose.**

**The dazzling flash of raindrops
Caught by sunshine on the green,
When birds are singing everywhere –
For earth's washed fresh and clean.**

**The endless depths of star-strewn nights
Whose silence and serenity
Belittle all our earthly strife
As measured by eternity.**

**The world is full of sights and sounds
That bring our hearts good cheer,
For just the time to cock an eye
Or lend a listening ear.**

© Susan Luckie Reilly

This poem was a gift to Sky's The Limit.



Proposed Observatory looking South towards Joshua Tree National Park. Milky Way watercolor by Martha Jacobsen. Building elevation by Ann Congdon.



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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A Message from the Committee Co-Chairs

An Observatory and Nature Center is happening because of generosity. Generosity in the giving of over 20,000 volunteer hours brought us to where we are today — building Phase I. Generosity — of those who have become *Galaxy 72 Investors* — is the major financial force for success. Generosity of the first two *Galaxy 72 Investors*, back in August of 2004, helped cover early expenses.

Generosity will provide the labor and materials donated to construct the Information and Workshop buildings of Phase I. In the months ahead we will introduce you to the businesses and artisans that have generously stepped forward with their commitment to build this Observatory and Nature Center.

In preparation for the Groundbreaking Ceremony, we compiled a list of every individual, organization, or entity that had contributed in any way up to that point — whether with a financial, in-kind, or time donation. We thought it might fill a small block on the front page of this newsletter. Instead, we had a full page with multiple columns of small type listing over 400 contributors. That is generosity on many levels.

The circle of generous *Galaxy 72 Investors* grew with the Groundbreaking Ceremony. Many who attended became *Galaxy 72 Investors*. SKY'S THE LIMIT has a goal of 1,000 *Galaxy 72 Investors* by the end of December 31, 2008. We are edging closer, and encourage you to add your pledge.

Let us remind you what a *Galaxy 72 Investor* is: a family, person, business, or club who has agreed to give \$10 or more a month for 72 months. People choose the amount and frequency of their giving (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, semiannually or annually), and how they wish to pay — credit card, monthly billing, or electronic fund transfer.

Your support of SKY'S THE LIMIT through the *Galaxy 72 Investors* program contributes to the success of the project by:

- Establishing a reliable and consistent cash flow
- Demonstrating a broad base of support when we apply for grants
- Providing matching funds for grants

Become one of the **Original 1000 *Galaxy 72 Investors***. Go to our website www.skysthelimit29.org, call us at 760-367-7222, stop by Basin Wide Foundation's office at 56711 Twentynine Palms Highway in Yucca Valley, or mail us a note with your name, address, telephone number, and email address and let us know how to contact you to arrange for your *Galaxy 72* investment in SKY'S THE LIMIT.

Jerri Hagman
Jerry Mattos
Committee Co-Chairpersons



Co-Chairs Jerri Hagman (far left) and Jerry Mattos (far right) are joined (from left) by Joel Klink, Mayor of Twentynine Palms; Lori Herbel, Yucca Valley Town Council; Steve Flock, Twentynine Palms City Council; Michael Tree, Twentynine Palms City Manager; and Paul Cook, State Assemblyman.



Col. Weston, USMC, was introduced by MC Curt Sauer, Superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park.



A narrated walk along the first Nature Trail was available for guests before and after the ceremony.



Assemblyman Paul Cook congratulated STL Committee Co-Chairs Jerri Hagman and Jerry Mattos.



The desert was at its best on September 30, 2007 with clear skies, pristine colors, and a light Northeast breeze.



The ceremony opened with the presentation of colors by the MCA GCC Color Guard and the playing of the National Anthem.



Owen Gillick, representing Basin Wide Foundation, greeted guests as they arrived on site in vans provided by Reach Out Morongo Basin, the City of 29 Palms, and the Town of Yucca Valley.



Younger members of the crowd raised their hands in thanks for the beautiful land.

All photos courtesy of Bill Easter.



Tucker Thornburg & Nicholas Council, Kindergartners from Twentynine Palms Elementary School, joined 92-year-old Betty Sleeth in turning the first shovels.



Connor Sauer introduced Chemehuevi Elder Joe Benitez, who blessed the land. Connor also shared inspirational readings and asked guests to raise their hands in gratitude for the land.



29 Palms Mayor Joel Klink and Yucca Valley Town Council member Lori Herbel joined Morongo Basin students of all ages and avid stargazer Betty Sleeth (center).



Huell Howser stands behind the STL committee at the end of the celebration.

Students participating in the groundbreaking represented all Morongo Basin schools:

- Tollian Waite**
Copper Mountain College
- Liam & Samuel O'Melia**
Friendly Hills Elementary (JT)
- Emily Hessner, Brett & Brittney Hollins, Shane Weston**
Joshua Springs Christian (YV)
- Charlie Thornburg**
Knott Sky Preschool (29)
- Maggie Wright** La Contenta Middle (YV)
- Joshua & Kathryn Douglas**
Oasis Elementary (29)
- Carter Diehl,**
Onaga Elementary (YV)
- Mark Isarraraz**
Palm Vista Elementary (29)
- Kyle Fleischman**
Sky High School (YV)
- Matthew & Nicholas Council, Shalise Lee, Miranda Palmer, Hunter Stepp & Tucker Thornburg**
29 Palms Elementary
- Daniel Douglas, Elizabeth Fleck & Rebecca Walls**
29 Palms Junior High
- Katie Ayala**
29 Palms High
- Eli & Renee Stanifer**
Yucca Valley Adventist Team School
- Kaya Stadler**
Yucca Valley Elementary
- Taylor & Aubrey Diehl**
Yucca Valley High