

SKY'S THE LIMIT

OBSERVATORY AND NATURE CENTER TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA



VOL I NO 1

Educational Mission: On Site, Bridging Art & Science

SKY'S THE LIMIT is already launched on its educational mission, even though no physical construction has begun on the site. Hinting at the broad scope of potential learning opportunities, two of the initial outreach programs involve artists as well as scientists. Participants in these programs found themselves on the site and/or under the stars.

In October of 2005, STL hosted 35 students and 2 professors from Princeton University's Physics Department (yes, THE Princeton) for a two-night camp-out in Joshua Tree National Park. STL Committee members Peter Bertain and Bill Souder handled logistics for the visit and provided night-sky seminars. The future scientists were awed by our remarkable natural planetarium, and sincerely appreciated the rare opportunity to view a pristine night sky.

Starting in the Spring of 2006, artists of the Morongo Basin have been invited to visit the 10-acre site to study the native flora and provide illustrations of the resident botanical species. These illustrations will be collected in a SKETCHBOOK annotated with scientific information as well as lore about the native uses of the plants. The SKETCHBOOK will be available for purchase from the STL office, and – eventually – from the Observatory Gift Shop. Preliminary glimpses of the illustrations promise a stunning publication.



Not in New Jersey anymore! Princeton University physics students enjoyed exploring the wonders of Joshua Tree National Park during the day, and the breathtaking view of the sky at night. STL Committee members arranged for the visit and provided astronomy lectures.



Committee Publication Chair Peter Bertain greeted artists on site in February 2006 to explain the SKETCHBOOK project. Individuals as well as established Morongo Basin arts organizations have been contacted. All local artists are invited to participate.

SPANISH NIGHTS GALA

SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2006 – 6 TO 9 PM

JOSHUA TREE COMMUNITY CENTER

6171 SUNBURST 760-366-8415



AUTHENTIC SPANISH PAELLA DINNER

FLAMENCO MUSICIANS AND DANCERS

SILENT AUCTION

\$40 PER PERSON DONATION TO BENEFIT

SKY'S THE LIMIT OBSERVATORY AND NATURE CENTER
ARTISTS' AUCTION DONATIONS IN ALL MEDIA WELCOMED

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

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SPRING 2006



A Message from the Committee Co-Chairs

Dear Friends of SKY'S THE LIMIT:

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dean Arvidson
Los Angeles

Peter Bertain
Yucca Valley

Ann Congdon
Twentynine Palms

Randy Councill
Twentynine Palms

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SKY'S THE LIMIT
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www.skysthelimit29.org

Watching the people of this SKY'S THE LIMIT Committee gather together to make a project come to life has been a grand experience for the two of us. The special talents and dedicated work of the committee members are carrying us toward the reality of an observatory in the Morongo Basin.

We began a couple of years ago by choosing a site – with the help of Patrick Morrissey from Cal Tech. Then, through the cooperation and generosity of the Del Gagnon family, the first 7 ½ acres were acquired. Later, the north 2 ½ acres were added – completing our 10-acre site located on the East side of Utah Trail, just North of the Twentynine Palms entrance to Joshua Tree National Park.

Having secured the land, we started to work on the planning. The vision expanded beyond the Observatory to include such things as nature trails, a plan to preserve the plants and rocks (yes, digging up and transplanting them elsewhere on the site), amateur telescope pads, an Orrery, a Sun Circle, an amphitheater, and classrooms.

From the beginning of the project we have held a vision of an educational model, based on the Lewis Center in Apple Valley, of “hands-on experiences” to educate people from pre-school citizens to senior citizens. The curricula are already being written for the Orrery, Sun Circle, and telescope pads – all of which are included in Phase I.

SKY'S THE LIMIT has successfully completed the Twentynine Palms City Planning process and has site approval of our concept. The City of Twentynine Palms has been very helpful to SKY'S THE LIMIT.

SKY'S THE LIMIT is looking for “win-win partnerships” and we have had a good start. The City of Twentynine Palms will build on-site kiosks indicating geological, historical, and other special interest points that can be seen from the site. A model of the site built by two Copper Mountain College students was the first of many anticipated CMC collaborations. Morongo Unified School District students are starting their first project with SKY'S THE LIMIT by maintaining our website, www.skysthelimit29.org. We are grateful to Valley Independent Print and Copy Center and Steve's Office Supply for their support of our inaugural newsletter. SKY'S THE LIMIT is looking forward to building more of these “win-win partnerships” in the future.

We thank all of you who have become GALAXY 72 members. GALAXY 72 Investors have found an easy way to give money to help create the SKY'S THE LIMIT Observatory and Nature Center. These people have committed to donate at least \$10 a month for 72 months, providing a dependable flow of income so that SKY'S THE LIMIT can make long-term plans for building and program development.

Right now we are in the process of selecting an engineering firm. Then we can start to work on saving plants and rocks, grading land, and beginning to build Phase I. We welcome you to join us for some rewarding, personal hands-on experiences.

**Jerri Hagman
and Jerry Mattos**
Committee Co-Chairs

A sketch of the proposed Observatory building looking South towards Joshua Tree National Park.



SKY'S THE LIMIT – The Year in Pictures



In April 2005, Committee members, assisted by Roger Arnold (far left), planted the sign on site. Bob Whitt generously donated his labor to fabricate the panels. James Doyle designed the logo.



Jerry Mattos and Bill Souder set a marker during the preliminary site walk-about. STL has spent many hours on site to consider the locations of buildings and activities as they relate to topography, solar access, views, and optimal orientation to the darkest night sky.



STL organized The Cactus Festival on Earth Day, April 23, 2005. The family-focused event featured bands, 17 booths, and games.



Artists walked the 10-acre site to become familiar with the flora and consider their selection for botanical illustrations.



Desert Sun Environment Reporter Benjamin Spillman interviewed Jason Moyer-Schmit for an article that appeared in December 2005. Everyone who visits the site is captivated by the panoramic views and vast sky canopy.

**“What more do you need?
A little garden to walk in,
and immensity to reflect on.
At your feet something to
cultivate and gather;
above your head
something to study and
meditate on;
a few flowers on earth
and all the stars
in the heavens.”
From Victor Hugo’s
*Les Miserables***



Michael Pritchard and Robert Burk – student sculptors in Steve Rieman’s class at Copper Mountain College – crafted an exquisite model of the whole 10-acre site. As in any dynamic process, there were subsequent revisions, but the main observatory building location remains the same.



A less refined study model, at a larger scale, helps analyze the potential for natural daylighting in the classrooms – using a light-shelf on South windows – at the time of the SUMMER SOLSTICE. Similar documentation has been done at the time of the WINTER SOLSTICE. The goal is to limit electric lighting to overcast days or after sunset.

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.

visit us online

www.skysthelimit29.org

STL Fundraising Events: Having Fun, Reaching For The Stars!

SKY'S THE LIMIT seeks unique ways to support its mission while providing Morongo Basin residents with opportunities to congregate and have a lot of fun.

On April 14, Sky's The Limit proudly sponsored opening night of Theatre 29's production of *Fiddler On The Roof*. An elegant evening treated patrons to pre-performance appetizers including champagne and caviar, and intermission coffee accompanied by Russian and Jewish desserts.

"Caramel Apples and Cactus" will be the theme of STL's booth at *Grubstake Days* in Yucca Valley, May 27 and 28. Look for us amid the games and booths for all ages at this family-oriented event.

See Page 1 for details on the upcoming second annual STL Gala.

OFFICE HOURS: 8 AM - 4 PM Mon - Thurs
PHONE: 760-367-7222

Arminda Ash, *Volunteer Office Manager*

Preserving A Precious Resource: Dark Night Sky

SKY'S THE LIMIT joins other groups in the Morongo Basin in support of preserving a precious resource. STL Committee member Bill Souder is chairman of the Best Lighting Practice group founded by Curt Sauer, Superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park. The group has representatives from throughout the Basin and is dedicated to preserving dark night skies, especially in the National Park.

Group members are active in addressing current lighting issues as well as proposing revisions to county and city light ordinances to reduce light pollution and energy consumption. For example, at a recent meeting a representative from *Ledtronics*, a manufacturer of high-efficiency, solid state lighting products, gave a presentation on their energy-conserving products.

STL provided partial funding for Souder to attend the International Dark Sky Association's recent Tucson Conference, which covered the status of the Model Lighting Ordinance project and several other dark sky protection projects.

STL applauds Morongo Basin Conservation Association's past president Christine Carraher for her initiation of a *Lighting Star* program to publicize homes and businesses that have dark-sky-friendly exterior lighting fixtures.



Please contact us if you would like a Press Kit or to arrange for a SKY'S THE LIMIT representative to speak to your organization.

We can address a variety of topics, from the very general to the very technical, and of interest to people of any age.



SKY'S THE LIMIT

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