

National Astronomy Day – What’s it All About?

By Nicole Gauthier, Docent – Cameron Park Rotary Community Observatory

National Astronomy Day is an annual event provides an opportunity for interaction between the general public and various astronomy enthusiasts, groups and professionals.

This event was started in 1973 by Doug Berger, the president of the Astronomical Association of Northern California. His intent was to set up various telescopes in busy urban locations so that passersby could enjoy views of the heavens. Since then the event has gain popularity and is now sponsored by many organizations associated with astronomy throughout the United States and other parts of the world. This past February there was a week long celebration of Astronomy Week in the Philippines with discussions on astronomy as a hobby and science, with telescope and photo exhibits, and stargazing sessions hosted by different astronomical organizations throughout that country.

National Astronomy Day also forms part of **Astronomy Week**, which begins on the preceding Monday. Each year Astronomy Day occurs on a Saturday between mid-April and mid-May, and is scheduled so as to occur at or just before the first quarter Moon. In the United States, this means that the event happens on a different date each year, rather than a set calendar date.

This year Astronomy Day will be celebrated locally at the Community Observatory in Placerville (6699 Campus Drive adjacent to the El Dorado Center, Folsom Lake College) on Saturday, May 7th starting at 7:30PM. Let’s all keep our fingers crossed for clear skies that evening!

One of the key features of the Community Observatory event will be Star Tours presented in the new “G. A. Cort Sky Theater”, a gift to the community from the Cameron Park Rotarians. It is a small outdoor amphitheater that seats several rows of spectators surrounding a docent who (with the help of the ever popular green laser pointers) will take your on a narrated a tour of the night sky. You will have an opportunity to experience a hands-on instruction about how to use Sky Maps to further your knowledge of the night sky. This sky map is a free download at www.skymaps.com and is updated each month. Additionally, this will be the first showing of the observatory’s new astronomical binoculars with a docent to show you how to use it yourself!

Another special feature of the evening will be numerous telescopes set up outside the observatory ranging in aperture from a 5” refractor telescope to a 16” Light Bridge telescope...with various sizes and different typed of telescopes in between. The featured planet that evening will be Saturn. With the array of telescopes available you should have brilliant views of Saturn and its rings. Numerous galaxies, nebulas and star clusters should be clearly visible through the observatory telescopes....and the team of docents is looking forward to sharing a fun and educational evening with you. Where else can you

have such fun with family and friends for FREE on a Saturday night? For driving directions, closure notices (in the unhappy event of more clouds!) go to www.communityobservatory.com or call (530) 344-5707 for a recorded message.