

HEAVENLY NEWS

“History of the Cameron Park Community Observatory”

By Cindy Terpe, Lead Docent

Cameron Park Rotary Club Community Observatory

“There’s an Observatory in Placerville?” That’s the response I get when I share with people that I am a docent at the Cameron Park Rotary Club Community Observatory. Even after the 13,550 visitors since 2006 (when we opened), we are still the best kept secret in the County. I would say that 3 out of 4 people are surprised that we have this great community resource right here in our home town.

Don’t let the name fool you. The Cameron Park Rotary Club Community Observatory or Community Observatory for short is actually located in Placerville adjacent to the El Dorado Center of Folsom Lake College. To explain the name, let me go back to January 2004 when the idea was conceived as a Centennial Project of the Cameron Park Rotary Club in recognition of the 100th anniversary of Rotary International.

Without letting grass grow under their feet, the Cameron Park Rotary Club invited the El Dorado County Office of Education and the Los Rios Community College District to become partners to assist in overcoming some of the major barriers that they would encounter with building an Observatory, i.e. land, parking, security, utilities and building maintenance. This partnership was formed by March 2004 and our name Cameron Park Rotary Club Community Observatory was created.

December 2005, the Rotary Club members raised all of the funds and donated time and materials to have the building completed. No public funds from El Dorado County Office of Education or the Los Rios Community College District were used to accomplish this. The next step was to recruit docent volunteers to educate and show the public all the wonders of our amazing universe. Within a short time of making the need for docents known, community members enthusiastically stepped forward to take advantage of the opportunity to educate their community without having to travel very far from home. We currently have 29 docents that unselfishly volunteer a minimum of four hours a month of their time to share their astronomy knowledge with the public. We couldn’t do it without them!

In August 2006, the Observatory began welcoming the public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, every weekend of the year, weather permitting. Soon after that, mid-week events were scheduled for schools, college classes, , scout groups and other community based clubs. With the assistance of additional private donations, we’ve added a video camera capability which allows us to show the details of the nebulas and galaxies and a Hydrogen-Alpha solar telescope so we can provide solar viewing programs.

Looking forward, we have short-term goals to build up our solar program to teach students, 3rd grade and up, about our closest star, the Sun. Plus, we will continue to grow our K-12 relationships with an outreach program within our schools that will allow teachers to extend the curriculum they teach in the classrooms out to the Observatory for hands-on learning. Our long-term goal is to design, fund and build an outdoor amphitheater for evening viewing under the stars. We need everyone’s help to

accomplish this grand goal! Oh, I can't forget one other very important piece of Observatory plans... we will soon begin construction of permanent restroom facilities (flushing toilets! Yeah!).

Lastly, none of this could have happened without all the partners. The El Dorado County Office of Education for the site, the Los Rios Community College District for the operations, the vision and dedication of the Cameron Park Rotary Club to educate and you, the community, the reason we are all doing this!

I hope the next time someone asks you about the Observatory, you will be able to say to them, "Yes, there is an Observatory in Placerville!" www.communityobservatory.com