

HEAVENLY NEWS

“What Does it Take to Be An Observatory Docent?”

By Frank Dibbell, Chief Docent, Community Observatory

Do the stars, planets and deep space objects fascinate you? Would you like to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with the public? If the answer is “Yes”, then please consider becoming a Community Observatory Docent!

A Docent is a trained volunteer who provides information to the public, most often found in museums. A Community Observatory Docent provides information to the public about the kinds of objects visible through telescopes, binoculars and the naked eye. Additionally, Observatory Docents operate telescopes and explain their basic functions. A Docent, in sum, is a teacher, an explainer, a questioner, and an enthusiast.

As an Observatory Docent, you will be asked to volunteer a couple hours of your time at least two evenings each month. Continuing education is offered for docents who want to expand their astronomical knowledge at monthly informal and fun training sessions, conducted by the more senior members of the Docent team

What kind of equipment do Observatory Docents operate at the observatory? The Observatory has two permanently mounted Celestron 14-inch telescopes. Each C-14 is mounted on an Astrophysics AP1200 mount, which is fully automated and computer controlled. This makes locating objects in the night sky relatively easy – simply “punch in” the object you want to see in the hand held computer, and the scope moves automatically to that object! In addition to the two C-14’s, the Observatory has a portable Celestron-11 telescope, also computer-controlled, and a 6-inch Newtonian reflecting telescope on a Dobson mount, which is manually controlled.

The Community Observatory is located behind the campus of the El Dorado Center of Folsom Lake College in Placerville, at the end of Campus Drive just off Green Valley Road. The Observatory is open to the public, free of charge, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings. In the winter months, the operating hours are from 7:30pm until 9:30pm. In the summer months, the operating hours are from 8:30pm until 10:30pm.

In addition to our weekend public programs, the Observatory Docent Team also provides educational programs (by appointment) for various community and educational organizations, including Scout Troops, professional organizations, and school classes of all ages, from elementary through college. Appointments can be made for targeted educational programs Monday through Thursday evenings. **School-age groups** can make arrangements for an Observatory visit by contacting the El Dorado County Office of Education (**530/295-2261**). **College-age and adult organizations** and other special community events can be scheduled by contacting the El Dorado Center of Folsom Lake College (**530/642-5622**).

Volunteering as an Observatory Docent is a great way to serve the community and have fun at the same time. If you feel this is something you would like to find out more about please contact the Chief Docent, Frank Dibbell at docentapps@sbcglobal.net, and you will receive a prompt response.

Four times a year the Observatory hosts a theme-based “Open House”. **Please join us at the Observatory’s “Meteor Showers” Open House on Saturday, August 9th, from 8:30PM - 10:30PM.**

For more information about the observatory such as closure notices and driving directions please go to www.communityobservatory.com.