

IPS President's message: Affiliate Meetings 2009

Fellow Planetarians

I am writing this message for all of the affiliate groups of the IPS and hope that you may find the time to use it at your regional meetings around the globe as you will appreciate that it is physically impossible for the President to attend all of them. I hope that you can spare 5 minutes for this at your meeting.

First, I must personally greet everyone who is listening or accessing this message in some format. I am very pleased that you have chosen to be an IPS member as there are great benefits to be had by belonging to our professional body. The first benefit, and most important in my view, is that IPS membership allows us all to get together every two years to see the latest developments in the planetarium field. Since I joined IPS in 1996, the technological changes in how we make shows and the variety of different methods of presenting images on our domes has undergone a huge change.

Second, you should be aware that there really is a unique solution for every problem that you can have, and you can bet that someone in the planetarium community has already experienced the problem and solved it. This is the second benefit of membership: we planetarians are an innovative bunch, and very gregarious and keen to share. This is most obvious at our conferences where it sometimes can be difficult to find a quiet spot for a chat: we are gregarious and noisy! I see this a great strength and hope that we continue to operate in this way.

At the conferences, you will reach the stage where you decide that although the new things the vendors are showing are lovely to have they are not really essential, and you will be assured because in the IPS crowd you will have blended into the spectrum of opinion. There will be: the early adapters who must have all of the new toys; the old hands who don't see the need for all of this new stuff; and always someone who definitely knows they can do/have done/or are about to do an even better version. I see this diversity as a huge strength, and I think that it would be a shame if

we were to fragment into small factionals, each pitching for the system that they currently run. We are big enough to encompass all opinions, and I sincerely hope that this will continue into the future.

I have been very concerned to learn that some of our colleagues and their planetariums are being forced to close, or are having their operations seriously restricted. I urge all of you to make it clear, at every media opportunity you have, that all of us on planet Earth are going to be reliant on the quality of the young physical scientists who graduate from our tertiary institutions. There is no better investment than in education. The countries who will be future winners will have absorbed and acted on this important point: the losers will be left behind if a blinkered short-term approach is adopted. In a recession the best investment will always be in people. I regret that, in my experience, the people with the most short-sighted vision and the most limited viewpoints are our politicians.

The International Year of Astronomy 2009 is proving to be an amazing opportunity for the planetarium community to show the public just how much space research and exploration is taking place. We have been offered a chance to show the public the incredible images that we have captured from Mars, and also from the Hubble Space Telescope time machine. Current exploration and research is providing lots of wonderfully detailed new material that will enhance the public's understanding of science. These images allow us to show the evidence of continuous change in the cosmos. With a new generation of space-based telescopes entering service we can expect that our efforts will have to increase as even more spectacular images are processed by the professional astronomers and astrophysicists, ready for release for our older audiences.

I want to end now as I know that your time is precious, and brevity is good. So, please accept my good wishes for the year ahead, and also from the other officers of the IPS, Secretary Lee Ann, Treasurer Shawn, Past President Susan and President Elect Dave.

President Tom Mason