

President's Message



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27 June-2 July IPS Conference

As I write this column, final preparations are being made for IPS 2008 in Chicago. A wonderful program is planned in a marvelous setting and all participants will experience another awesome conference. I look forward to seeing hundreds of my friends and colleagues again as we "Explore the Edge" together at the 19th International Planetarium Society Conference.

26-30 June 2010 IPS Conference

Even as we conclude preparations for 2008, Dr. Omar Fikry is already making preliminary arrangements for our 20th IPS Conference at the Library of Alexandria. So mark your calendars, read up on the history of the ancient city of Alexandria, Egypt and make plans to attend another remarkable conference in 2010.

Ghana Project

You may remember from my December column that as part of the Outreach Committee's efforts to assist planetariums in developing countries, IPS has initiated a pilot project that we hope will lead to future astronomical outreach to many developing countries. I would like to extend the gratitude of all IPS members to the very special people who had the imagination, heart, and tenacity to bring this unique IPS project to fruition. The

sheer magnitude of the time and money for the planning and implementation of the project and the far-reaching impact of such an initiative are overwhelming.

So we give a big thank you and congratulations to:

Jon Elvert: Jon is chair of the IPS Outreach Committee and has provided encouragement and essential assistance to all parties involved in this project. He inspired the Louisiana Art & Science Museum to donate their used MediaGlobe.

Carol Gikas: Carol is president & executive director of the Louisiana Art & Science Museum and the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of the Louisiana Art & Science Museum in donating their MediaGlobe. Even though the projector is old technology to the museum, it will be used by someone who will see it as new and exciting technology.

Dave Weinrich: Dave is the project coordinator, educator, and IPS ambassador to Ghana. He has admirably pulled together all the people and resources to make this project a reality.

Joanne Young: All refurbishing costs and labor for getting the MediaGlobe in shape and training for Dave were provided by Audio Visual Imagineering, and AVI will provide customer support for years to come.

Dr. Jacob Ashong: Jacob had a dream of building Ghana's first science center in Accra and his vision included a planetarium. IPS provided a means for him to get the planetarium and so did Jacob. He provided the active involvement of personnel and resources from Ghana to build a facility to house the projector, ship the projector to Ghana and to establish support staff to operate the planetarium. He is facilitating the planning, the implementation and the future operation of the planetarium.

Ruth Barbley: Ruth is currently a student at Minnesota State University-Moorhead. She is member of the family with whom Dave lived while he was a Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia. Her sister, Glowen, lives in Ghana and is personally acquainted with Jacob Ashong. As a volunteer, Ruth will be assisting Dave with the training of planetarium personal in Ghana.

Dave has been keeping me updat-



Top: Jacob Ashong (in the white shirt) stands in the middle of his dream project discussing building plans for the planetarium in Ghana. Next three photos: The walls are rising; it is obvious that a domed building is being constructed for the MediaGlobe. First three images by Jane ashong; bottom image by William Tackie.

ed on this project. In January, he wrote, "I am planning to go to Ghana around the end of May and return just before the IPS conference. One of my next steps is to start planning the training for the Ghanaian operators. I am glad that I worked with Eileen Starr in teaching some STARLAB workshops and other astronomy workshops. That experience, plus my Peace Corps experience in Liberia and Ghana as well as my sabbatical in Sri Lanka, should be useful."

The MediaGlobe was shipped in early March and Jacob was making rapid progress on constructing the dome. Also in early March, Dave and Ruth went to Orlando, Florida during their university spring break to visit with Joanne and to train on the MediaGlobe. Dave reported, "It is a very easy projector to operate. The key will be to train the operators in some basic astronomy. I also learned how to assemble the projector and do simple maintenance. So I feel adequately prepared in that area. Joanne and her company have bent over backward to help with this project. They have really gone the extra mile!"

On April 16 Dave wrote, "It is getting close for our departure to Ghana. Ruth is leaving on May 10 and I'm leaving 11 days later, on the 21."

I eagerly look forward to Dave's pictures and progress report at the conference in Chicago.

Contact Information: Jon Elvert, jelvert@lasm.org; David Weinrich, weinrich@mnstate.edu; Jacob Ashong, jacob_ashong@yahoo.com; and Joanne Young, joanne@av-imagineering.com.

Outreach to Portable Planetarium Directors in your Region

I have heard from two new volunteers who are actively working within their affiliate organizations to reach the portable planetarium community in their regions. Dayle Brown, in the GLPA region, and Christi Whitworth, in the SEPA region, will keep us informed of the number of portables in those regions and gather information about their activities and well as spread the good news of IPS. I am grateful to these two new volunteers.

The goal is to have a designated individual in each affiliate organization to pass information from portable dome directors to IPS and from IPS to portable dome directors. IPS officers want to know what is happening in the portable dome world and we want portable dome directors to know that they are not alone; there are resources and ideas to be shared. Many times the portables are not affiliated with any organization because they do not know about the benefits. We must seek them out and keep them informed about activities and opportunities. Typically, I will not be sending news directly to be passed on to

portables. Rather than that, I would like the information in my "Mobile News" column to be passed on through your newsletters and through any electronic news you feel will reach members and perhaps non-members of your affiliate. I would also like regular reports sent to me, at least once a year, for inclusion in my column for portables.

International Year of Astronomy 2009

I am sure we will find out about more activities and materials being designed and created for IYA2009 at the conference in Chicago. We know that in each country planetarians are represented in IYA2009 National Nodes and



Working Groups and they are dedicated to creating the exposure that we need and finding ways to educate and excite students, teachers and the general public about astronomy. You can meet and talk with colleagues at IPS 2008 and get inspired by everyone's IYA2009 plans. Here are just a few projects that I am aware of through email communications:

Agnes Acker, Association of French-Speaking Planetariums, wrote to tell me about the situation in France. She explained, "I am member of the National Committee of the "Annee Mondiale de l'Astronomie" (AMA09, see www.astronomy2009.fr), where I represent in particular the planetariums in France. We are working on many specific operations since March 2007. About 150 projects were submitted coming from associations, planetariums, observatories, universities, and more than 100 received the label AMA09. The French Planetariums (via APLF) will produce, in strong collaboration with the ESO, a show titled The Quest of Our Cosmic Origins, devoted to the mondial project ALMA."* Agnes Acker, ackeragnes@aol.com.

Javier Armentia of the Spanish Planetarium Association wrote, "...the Spanish Node of the IYA2009 has included a representation

* ALMA is the Atacama Large Millimeter Array, an international partnership between the United States (National Science Foundation) and Europe. European participants include the member states of the European Southern Observatory (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland), the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France), the Max-Planck Gesellschaft (Germany), the Netherlands Foundation for Research in Astronomy, and the United Kingdom Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. - ed.

from the Spanish planetariums and considered them as one of the pillars for the celebration of 2009. The planetarian community actively works inside the node, and promotes activities nationwide in close contact with all the other institutions (National Commission for Astronomy, astronomical institutes, university departments, Spanish astronomers associations) that compose the committee for the Spanish Node. Many of the activities of the IYA in Spain will take place in the planetariums and science centers (as anyone could expect), and the Spanish Association of Planetariums is producing—as a team—two planetarium shows that will air during 2009 in all the Spanish planetariums." Javier Armentia, javarm@pamploneterario.org.

Shawn Laatsch, IPS Treasurer and planetarium director at the Imiloa Astronomy Center of Hawaii, announced "Two of the nation's most advanced planetariums and their producers have partnered with Interstellar Studios, with Imiloa as the lead planetarium, to produce a companion fulldome program to the Public Television broadcast of 400 Years of the Telescope. This collaboration will produce a visual experience of the history of the telescope that will be shown in planetariums throughout the country and the world. Free distribution of this program will be provided to hosting planetariums." Read more at www.400years.org/planetariums.html.

Chuck Bueter of Granger, Indiana, the *Planetarian's* advertising coordinator, wrote to tell me that "Art Klinger (director of the PHM Planetarium in Mishawaka, Indiana) and I recently received a Toyota TAPESTRY grant to introduce students in the planetarium to outdoor lighting issues and to conduct a district-wide experiment outside to quantify the sky glow in our community." See information at www.lettherebenight.com/pltm.html.

Chuck continues: "While we have a mix of stories and an in-dome activity that support dark-sky advocacy, we want to create some original content that ties the diverse segments together into a common storyline. Specifically, we want to introduce IYA, outdoor lighting issues, the 400 years thing, Galileo, and the implications of his key observations. We have to move fast if we are to get a product into the hands of planetarians in time for IYA2009 (and particularly in time for the March 2009 Globe at Night campaign, an IYA Cornerstone Project).

"We are also considering a novel approach to generate the artwork for the planetarium program and to drive visitors to more information and to new experiences after they leave the dome. Specifically, we are considering creating the equivalent of a "holodeck" in the 3D virtual world of Second Life that would allow visiting avatars (a computer generated archetype) to enter a nighttime environment,

to alter the outdoor lighting, and to experience how the light pollution changes, for better or for worse, from their actions.

"Within the built SL environment, we could capture video of a narrating avatar for snippets in the planetarium show. That way the planetarium visitor "meets" the avatar narrator in the dome and continues that relationship in the holodeck."

Chuck Bueter, bueter@nightwise.org; for more on Second Life, check out secondlife.com.

Publicity Coordinator for the IPS

Please welcome Jacques Guarinos, of Astronef, Planétarium de Saint-Etienne, as the new publicity coordinator for the International Planetarium Society!

As part of the IPS Outreach Committee, Jacques will be responsible for communicating to the national and international print, radio, television, and electronic media information about the IPS, its activities and achievements, and statements from the Society.

Primarily, these communications will be about IPS-related issues. However, from time to time there will be issues on which the IPS wishes to make a statement that reflects the official IPS view on a particular subject.

Feel free to contact him with your congratulations and ideas about how he (and perhaps you) can assist in promoting planetariums and the vital role we play in the world.

If you send him a report on what you are doing for IYA2009, he can compile a report and promote planetariums with that information.

Contact Information: Jacques Guarinos (directeur, Astronef, Planétarium de Saint-Etienne, Espace Fauriel, 28 rue Ponchardier, F-42100 Saint-Etienne, France; phone: +33 (0) 4 77 34 40 85 or +33 (0) 6 07 23 53 62; guarinos@astronef.fr.

Be Proactive to Stay Viable

Speaking of promoting planetariums, we can raise the status of planetariums in general through our new IPS Publicity Coordinator and you can make your planetarium indispensable to your community by being vigilant about "blowing your own horn!"

I cringe at each news item I read about another planetarium closing. I know the reali-

ty is that, no matter what we do, some planetariums will be closed because someone has an agenda that does not include keeping the planetarium open, no matter how valuable it is. We must make our best effort to help ourselves so that we can always at least make a good argument for keeping the planetarium open. Many times this strategy will work.



Wilbear and his fulldome Adventure Team: Alan Davenport (MAPS), Sharon Shanks (GLPA) and Gary Meibaum (SEPA); story on page 28. Photo by Susan Button.

Please do not wait until it is too late and never lower your guard! Build a support system and make your planetarium an indispensable institution in your community! We must be as expert at marketing our planetariums as we are about running the planetarium.

The first thing is to remind yourself about all the facets of marketing your facility. Perhaps you can do this by networking with staff members at successful planetariums and find out what they are doing right and by rereading "Planetarium Promotion 101: An Introduction to Marketing for the Planetarium Professional." You can find this article at www.ips-planetarium.org/planetarium/articles/planetarium-promotion101.html.

Not only do you have to market your planetarium, you have to be savvy about the financial realities of making the planetarium profitable. Administrators need your help in proving that the planetarium justifies the cost to run it. What is the financial value of the planetarium? Either the planetarium pays its own way by revenues generated through ticket sales and donors or by providing critical benefits to the museum or community. Plan-

etariums can raise the level of scientific literacy in their communities and excite students about furthering their education in the fields of hard sciences. The impact of these things can be measured.

Yes, this also applies to those planetariums housed in a school. In a school situation, the administrators consider measurable outcomes to be the justification needed to pay for having a planetarium. They need to prove to the school board and the taxpayers that the planetarium program is a valuable use of classroom time. The trick is that "measurable outcomes" are valuable, whether they are just perceived or able to be actually quantitatively measured.

For instance, "How does the planetarium assist students to pass tests?" or "What can the planetarium provide, as a laboratory, that the classroom cannot?" Focus on the positive; the planetarium is the most cost- and time-effective means for affectively and cognitively locking in concepts that cannot be experienced by reading textbooks or performing classroom labs. It is imperative that students have the advantage of using the planetarium as a laboratory to examine and confirm space science concepts explored in the classroom.

Here are some words of wisdom from Dr. Douglas Duncan, an astronomer at the University of Colorado and director of Fiske Planetarium. He previously was on the staff of the Hubble Space Telescope, which he left in the early 1990s to be part of the modernization of the Adler Planetarium. (If what follows sounds familiar, an earlier version appeared on Dome-L, and he expands on his thoughts here.):

"I've been watching a few planetariums succeed and a larger number fail for many years.

"The ones at risk base their decisions on what technology can they buy and what can they do with it. The ones that succeed base their decisions on "who is my audience, and what can I give them that others can't?"

"The result of the latter thinking is that you don't try to compete with Disney, and you don't buy technology that makes you so expensive your audience can't afford to attend.

"I became aware of these two views when I planned exhibits and programs for the modernization of Adler planetarium in the early 1990s. Before spending large amounts of mon-

ey locally I toured the best science museums in several countries to examine the process by which they made such good programs. I found they all used the same process, and it was audience and goal based. 'Who are we trying to reach? What do we want them to leave with?' (eg. Knowledge about the 'new' solar system. Excitement about astronomy.) These museums knew their audience far better than any planetarium. They had clear goals, and they measured if the goals were achieved. Technology was used when it supported goals; otherwise not. (Visit the Exploratorium in San Francisco, one of my top museums, and you'll see what I mean.)

"We fill our theater (210 seats) many Friday nights with live talks by interesting astronomers and people such as Phil Plait (the *Bad Astronomy* author). These people talk for free. Admission is \$6. During the week we often have live talks given by astronomy students whom we train in public speaking. Again, cost is minimal and we offer a personal interaction that other venues don't. We know our audience, which in this college town is pretty highly educated. So our advertising emphasizes fun and education. Movies don't offer the latter; neither does Disney. That is the niche for the smart planetarium.

"It isn't about technology, folks, it's about the message you can bring to people. A good example is Apple Computer. They know their potential users and make technology to support what users like. A compelling and educational story, with less 'gee whiz' technology is always better than gee whiz special effects supporting a thin message. You should hear the scorching comments of audience members about this when you interview them. Presenting cool science in an accessible way is not the same as dumbing down, or presenting cartoons, and the public knows this. Of course, you need to do interviews—assessment—and listen to your audience, to see for yourself.

"Basing decisions primarily on technology

is one of the largest risk factors I've seen leading to planetariums having trouble."

Contact information: Dr. Douglas Duncan, Department of Astrophysical & Planetary Sciences, University of Colorado; Phone +1 303-735-6141 or +1 303- 492-5003; casa.colorado.edu/~dduncan.

And lastly, to keep your planetarium viable, use partnerships to enhance publicity,

It isn't about technology, folks, it's about the message you can bring to people.

save money and connect the planetarium to the community.

You can join with other planetariums and form a block of buying power when purchasing or designing shows. Some producers are even encouraging planetariums to do just that; planetariums are receiving the benefit of lower pricing by forming a block of multiple purchasers!

You can also attend conferences and/or examine the proceedings from regional and IPS conferences. Many times there are papers printed in these proceedings that provide examples of how your colleagues lowered the cost of production through partnering with other planetariums or organizations in their communities.

Take Advantage of Networking

One way to ensure that you keep your planetariums alive is to take advantage of networking. One kind of serendipitous professional collaboration was unveiled at the 2007 GLPA-MAPS-SEPA Conference in Wheeling, West Virginia.

Sharon Shanks, our *Planetarian* editor, is planetarium lecturer at the Ward Beecher Planetarium at the Youngstown State University in Ohio. Sharon imagined and produced a delightful planetarium program for young children. The story centered on Wilbear, a young teddy bear who wanted to fly. Sharon

told us that she had lots of help in creating the final version of this show.

The initial program of slides and video was born thanks to talented university staff, including the narrator and photographer, and the university's public radio station recording studio. A co-worker provided the live action video sequences and Sharon's daughter drew the artwork. Sharon says, "the only actual cost

for the program was for slide production."

That show ran successfully for two years. During the second year, children under 7 years of age were

invited to a tea party with teddy bear music, punch, bear-shaped cookies and time to listen to a bear story. Coordinating the show with this pre-show activity and making a closer connection with young families in the community increased attendance.

Next came collaboration with two other planetariums. Sharon basically gave the show away for the cost of the DVD and mailing and that was all she meant to do: share a program for young children with colleagues. An order came in from Gary Meibaum, director of the planetarium at the St. Charles Parish Library in Luling, Louisiana. With the help of a Tulane University student, Jason Talley, the show was transformed into full-dome format for their MediaGlobe and a copy was sent back to Sharon in a form compatible with her SciDome projector! Then Sharon sent a full-dome video copy to Alan Davenport, director of the Maynard F. Jordan Planetarium in Orono, Maine. He adapted it for his Mirror Dome projector!

You can read the full story and see images on pages 135-138 in the conference *Proceedings*.

By examining other collaborative efforts you can learn ways to become more effective and cost efficient. You too can make this kind of networking profitable for you and maybe even adapt these methods as "standard operating procedure!" The community of planetariums is relatively small; therefore, we need to keep in mind the necessity of supporting each other and working together. Planetariums should neither be isolated nor be forced to reinvent the wheel.

Contact Information: Sharon Shanks, slshanks@ysu.edu; Gary Meibaum, gary.meibaum@stcharles.lib.la.us; Alan Davenport, alan@galaxymaine.com.

I look forward to meeting with colleagues in Chicago to further discuss, in person, these ideas and other challenges that face planetariums. I am sure we will all leave with many new perspectives and action plans to insure that planetariums not only survive but also thrive in the future. ☆



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