



Photos contributed

Alan Dyer is an avid photographer. Here, he gets set up to capture some astrophotography into the evening at the Reesor Ranch in the Cypress Hills.

Well-known name in astronomy the guest speaker for June's Spock Days star-gazing evening in Vulcan

BY STEPHANIE LABBE
VULCAN

A well-known name in astronomy will attend the June 12 public stargazing evening at the Trek Centre which kicks off Spock Days in Vulcan.

Alan Dyer, who lives near Vulcan, will be the guest speaker for the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) Calgary Chapter's annual stargazing evening held the Friday night of Spock Days weekend.

This year marks the 50th anniversary for the Star Trek franchise, so Vulcan is excited to have a well-known name in astronomy as the guest speaker — and even better, he is a local resident.

Neel Roberts, a spokesperson for the RASC Calgary Chapter and one of the organizers for Spock Days, is excited Dyer is going to be joining them for June's stargazing evening this year.

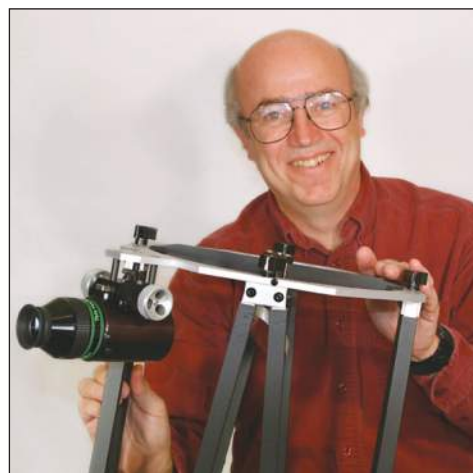
The RASC-hosted stargazing evenings take place the second Friday of every month at the Trek Centre in Vulcan.

"We've not only always had people show up since 2010, but recently (the crowds) have been consistently over 30 and in fact had 50 plus at our last one. This is very encouraging and shows participants like the *Prairie Post* getting the word out is effective," says Roberts in an e-mail interview.

Holding an event the Friday night that falls on Spock Days each year in Vulcan has become something the community and people from across the country have looked forward to every year.

Roberts says it's amazing how well the Star Trek franchise has done in 50 years and is still going strong.

"The Star Trek franchise celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and has never been stronger. I don't believe any TV, movie or Hollywood production has had this much success with no end in sight," says Roberts. "When Leonard Nimoy visited in 2010, it really gave a boost to Spock Days and even after his passing away this year, the town has enjoyed an excellent relationship with the brand,



Alan Dyer will be the guest speaker for the June star gazing evening hosted by the RASC Calgary Chapter at the Trek Centre in Vulcan. The event helps kick off Spock Days weekend.

which fits very well with the RASC Calgary's astronomy outreach. No other division of the 29 Chapter, 4,000-plus members has this unique approach."

Dyer is a well-known author, lecturer and full-time astronomer who is also a member of the Calgary chapter.

Roberts explains Dyer is involved in many events and because of people such as him, the Calgary division of RASC has enjoyed robust growth compared to other regions.

"He is a household name in the industry and for him to accept the invitation means we have value for the public. In fact, in some of his posts ... he actually mentions us to the media like CBC and he would not do this if we were a waste of time," adds Roberts.

"When heavy hitters come to a small town, it's excellent publicity, which is not a normal event," adds Roberts.

Other features at this year's Spock Days include the usual Hollywood celebrities and 2015 will be the first year they will have a Comic Con known as Vul-Con.

"We are looking to grow a stronger

presence with telescopes as the town can position itself to promote such a scientific instrument and Ken from of All Star Telescopes in Didsbury will be present with several models this year. We already have our equipment on display in the Trek Centre, which gets lots of interest," adds Roberts.

Dyer is excited to be a part of Spock Days this year. He's always kept in touch with the astronomy community in Vulcan. He's supported the outreach efforts at the Trek Centre as best as he can through social media channels.

"I've followed the Spock Days programs, but haven't had the chance to participate until this year. One of the organizers, Neel Roberts, contacted me some months ago about speaking in June, so I signed up to be a guest speaker very early on in the planning," explains Dyer.

For the event, Dyer will speak the Friday night at the Trek Centre, giving several shorter talks through the evening, which intersperse with telescope viewing outside of the sun followed by evening stargazing once the sky gets dark enough. Venus and Jupiter will both be prominent in the evening sky, says Dyer.

"The Spock Days programs have garnered a lot of great publicity for the town and for space and astronomy over the years, so I'm very pleased to at last participate in this terrific community event," adds Dyer.

Dyer grew up in Winnipeg and had his first astronomy job at the Planetarium at the Manitoba Museum. From there, he moved to Alberta where he worked for the planetariums and science centres in Edmonton and Calgary.

Currently, Dyer lives in Wheatland County, "next door under the dark skies of rural Alberta," he says.

For as long as Dyer can remember, he has loved the stars and the planets.

"I've had a life-long passion for astronomy, since the 1960s with the first bright satellites to be launched, which I

remember tracking from my home in Winnipeg and of course following the Apollo Moon landings. However, there's as much going on now in the space program — indeed, far more — that's just as exciting as back in the 'good old days'," explains Dyer.

This July, there will be the opportunity to see close up views of Pluto and its moons.

Other accomplishments Dyer speaks about in his astronomy career include being part of the groups that designed and operated the then-new (in 1984) planetarium and space sciences centre in Edmonton, which is now the greatly-expanded TELUS World of Science.

Dyer also worked as associate editor for *Astronomy* magazine and from the 1990s on he worked for the science centre in Calgary.

In late 2013, Dyer retired from TELUS Spark and has since pursued his interests in writing, astrophotography and travel.

He's currently writing a new ebook on nightscapes and time-lapse photography.

"I have plans for many more ebooks in the future about photography and backyard stargazing. I enjoy presenting, what I hope are, inspiring talks to astronomy clubs and the public at various venues," says Dyer.

Later this summer, Dyer will present some night photography workshops at Waterton Lakes National Park, the first as part of their Wildflower Festival on June 25 and 26.

"Even if the night of June 12 proves cloudy, do come out anyway, as I'll have lots to show in my talk indoors and we'll be able to at least talk about telescopes and the night sky, even if clouds prevent us from seeing the real things," adds Dyer.

Dyer says his talks will be filled with a lot of images he's taken of the Alberta sky from around the area as well as time-lapse movies. He's calling his talk 'The Amazing Sky'.