

Monthly public stargazing event Dec. 12 celebrates the fourth anniversary at Vulcan Trek Station

By ROSE SANCHEZ

VULCAN

For the past four years, Vulcan residents and visitors to the community have enjoyed learning more about the night sky thanks to a partnership between the Royal Astronomy Society of Canada (RASC) Calgary Chapter and the Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station.

The second Friday each month in the evening, avid astronomers volunteer their time to teach people more about the night sky and special events happening. Then visitors have the opportunity to look at the stars or other objects, such as Venus or the moon, through telescopes set up at the Trek Station.

The night-time viewing events started in 2003, but only took place every now and then. Four years ago, Neel Roberts, a volunteer with the RASC Calgary Chapter, saw an opportunity to make them a monthly occurrence. They now attract anywhere from 12 to 24 people, but have had more than 100 for the odd evening.

Four years ago when it began its regular monthly appearance in December, the topic was about a lunar eclipse. Roberts says it was a special start to the programming, when a family from Australia, who had just landed in Calgary for vacation, heard about the

event on CBC Radio and decided rather than travelling to Banff right away, they would attend the event in Vulcan. It's been nothing but success ever since.

"A lot of the people travel a long distance to attend," says Roberts, who is pleased the partnership has stayed strong the past four years.

The fourth anniversary will be marked Dec. 12 with cake and refreshments. The evening gets underway at 7:30 p.m., as it does the second Friday of each month.

The presentation will be about "Christmas in the Sky" and then there is a chance to see the stars through the 11-inch Celestron telescope which will be set up outside.

The evenings are made possible thanks to the volunteer efforts of RASC members and those at the Trek Station. Roland Dechesne and Karl Ivarson Jr. are regular volunteers, along with Roberts, who speak about astronomy items of interest and help people see more of the night sky using the various viewing devices available for use.

One of the latest additions to the program this year, which Roberts is excited to offer is the ability for people to hook up their Smartphones to a telescope and be able to take pictures of the night sky.

The special tool to do this, works with any type of Smartphone.

Roberts plans on ensuring the monthly educational and viewing opportunities continue and that is possible because of the volunteers who make up the team.

"The guys I'm working with, including the staff at the Trek Station, are so dedicated," he adds.

Officials with the Trek Station are also pleased to work with the RASC.

"The Trek Station is about science and technology and we're known for Star Trek. Astronomy falls into that realm," says Devan Daniels, manager of the Trek Station.

"Stargazing is a popular event that is free of charge and you can learn something."

Daniels is working to further the partnership opportunities with the RASC. They have been provided space in the Trek Station to set up their own static display, as well as an expanded section may appear on the website. He also hopes to see a few extra stargazing events offered throughout the year, especially when there are unique sky-viewing opportunities.



Photos by Neel Roberts

Dawne Mason and Dan Froning of Calgary are regular Spock Day fans and always ride on the RASC Calgary float in the parade that takes place each year the second Saturday in June.

"We're very happy to have the Royal Astronomy Society of Canada here," he adds.

For further information about the monthly events, contact the Trek Center at 403-485-2994 and the website at: www.vulcantourism.com is updated regularly.



Karl Ivarson Jr.'s expertise allows youth to use the 11-inch Celestron telescope with ease.