



Figure 3 — The Trottier Observatory in the SFU Science Courtyard. Photo: SFU Creative Services.

Dr. Howard Trottier suggested a partnership between the Faculty of Science at SFU and the Vancouver Centre. In exchange for RASC volunteers bringing their telescopes to star parties as well as staffing the observatory for public events, SFU would continue to offer the Vancouver Centre meeting rooms and lecture halls for free, as well as share a percentage of the observatory time for use by members of the Vancouver Centre.

The Vancouver Centre is thrilled to be invited as an active partner in SFU's public outreach observatory program. We are looking forward to many years of great star parties and other public events. Currently, our annual International Astronomy Day activities are hosted at SFU. In May this year, 8000 people attended the Astronomy Day event, which was held in conjunction with SFU's Science Rendezvous festival. ★

RASC and *Star Trek*— A Match Made for the Heavens

by Neel Roberts, Calgary Centre
Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com

They say 1965 was a good year, and even though I made my debut then, I just had to look back and see just what made it so special. Being stuck to the crib for some time afterward, I had to trust reliable folk and historical records from years later. To my delight, I found out my favourite sci-fi TV show launched that year. Yes, *Star Trek*—that phenomenon known worldwide as one of the greatest space stories—had its unveiling on Burbank Street in Los Angeles that summer. The brain child of producer Gene Rodenberry, it was initially rejected by NBC for airing that year. It eventually reached the airwaves in 1966 with the first regular episode, *The Man Trap*, broadcast on Thursday, 1966 September 8, from 8:30–9:30 as part of an NBC “sneak preview” block. While the original series managed to linger for three years, it had none of the fanfare of today.

After lying dormant for 10 years (though with reruns on syndicate TV and cartoons), the next production with the original cast came in 1979 with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Experts seem to believe that this not only reignited interest among diehards but sparked curiosity within a new generation, eventually leading to 11 more movies and 6 more TV series. It's still going, with a new movie, *Star Trek Beyond*, set to launch in August 2016. Today the *Star Trek* business is a multi-billion entity with paraphernalia for sale all over the globe. Were Rodenberry alive today, he would not have believed its success. Now, having lived through all of it myself, I can attest that 1965 was indeed a great time to enter the Earth.

Fast forward to today. For the past 17 years, I've been a resident near the town of Vulcan, Alberta. Before Vulcan, I'd lived in Toronto (Rexdale to be specific), Ontario, and had only heard of Vulcan through the Saturn commercials of about 20 years ago; I never would have imagined then that I'd land up here. However, in August 1998, the farm I live on today, just outside of town, became my home. Coincidentally, it was the opening ceremony of the *Star Trek* Museum. It was a grand event for the under-2000 population of Vulcan. As the most up-to-date building in this agriculture town, it got a lot

Figure 1 — (Clockwise from upper left) The Trek Station at night under a waxing Moon. Courtesy of Vulcan Tourism; Inside the Trek Station where a presentation by Calgary's Roland Dechesne is made to a standing-room-only audience; Global TV Calgary interviews the author; Leonard Nimoy remembered by one of many millions of fans. This bust is on permanent display in downtown Vulcan; author Neel Roberts (left), astronomy co-ordinator Karl Ivarson Jr. (centre), and Calgary member Roland Dechesne (right) ready to participate in the annual Spock Days parade with the 20-inch telescope on their float.



of attention. I still remember as a newcomer in my '74 Ford farm truck, wearing a cowboy hat, saying to myself "I'm going to be involved in this" with no idea how and for what.

I have a love for the stars—that's why I moved out of the big city and bought a farm. Even though I had no telescope, star chart, or idea what was up there in the sky, I had a passion to learn and to help others along the way. Technology at that time was starting to move in the direction of the Internet and portable devices, but they were still pricey and nowhere near as developed as today. In 2003, I was introduced to *Starry Night*, a program way ahead of the times, that allowed me to travel virtually to other planets, galaxies, and more. It let me look at the cosmos from different time periods and land on places like Saturn, under the rings.

I decided to take a chance and share *Starry Night* with the local newspaper and a tour co-ordinator at the Trek Station. They absolutely fell in love with it and wanted more. Simon Ducatel, reporter for the *Vulcan Advocate*, later ask me to write a monthly column called *Sky's the Limit*, which still runs today. That was followed more recently by a column called *Your Universe* in the *Prairie Post*.

Organized stargazing in Vulcan began in 2003, but it had trouble getting off the ground because it was missing one thing—experts on the subject. In 2009, I joined the Calgary Centre. I had heard of the club but, after joining, sure wished I had hooked up earlier. They were such a natural fit to what I had hoped for Vulcan and for the hunger to learn the sky that people seemed to have. Regular meetings in Vulcan were launched officially with the total lunar eclipse of 2010 December 21. Participants came from as far as Australia for a look through an 11-inch Celestron telescope. Unknown to the facilitators, the event was broadcast by several news stations, including CBC Calgary. Later, after an afternoon interview with Global TV, I knew for sure I was onto something.

Since that eclipse, the Calgary Centre has planted firm roots in Vulcan with permanent displays at the telescope, astronomy materials, and about 1000 pictures of their events, including the famous "Spock Days" that is the town's main annual celebration—a (much) smaller cousin of the Calgary Stampede. Stars from Hollywood such as Walter Koenig (Pavel Chekov from the original series), Marina Sirtis (Deanna Troi from *Star Trek Next Generation*), and Garrett Wang (Ensign Harry Kim from *Star Trek Voyager*) have visited Vulcan. The RASC has a float and a mobile 20-inch telescope that they bring for the parades. Riders dress up as their favourite characters, led by the RASC banner on the vehicles.

The Trek Station has been in business for over 17 years now with a present annual visitation of 14,000 patrons. The RASC Calgary Centre recognized the centre and the citizens of Vulcan by a corporate award. Robyn Foret, President of the Calgary Centre, explained that the awards committee "was honoured to recognize the efforts you and the other "Vulcans" put forth. We don't give out that award every year and it sometimes is difficult to find a good corporate citizen and proponent of light-pollution abatement. You guys made it an easy pick for us this year." Tour Manager Devan Daniels has praised the work done by the Calgary Centre and wants to try to expand the program. Shannon Clark and Karen Haller are the regular Vulcan Tourism employees present on Friday nights to assist with the presentations and leave excellent, lasting impressions to all visitors.

The RASC recently promoted the idea of astrophotography with smartphones. Started as an experiment by Alycia Ivarson three years ago with her iPhone, it has caught on like a Prairie wildfire, challenging Vulcan members to turn it into an easy-to-use pastime. RASC members Norm Baum from Carmangay and his wife Rose Marie are regular participants and avid astrophotographers. Norm does a “show and tell” using images captured from his sky over the month and shows others the basics on how they can get going. Apps such as *Sky Safari Pro 4* and *Pocket Universe*, computer programs like *Starry Night*, and GPS-enabled telescopes have made the astronomy game much friendlier for the beginner. In fact, the average amateur can sound like an astrophysics professor in a short time!

Astrophotographer Alan Dyer was the guest speaker at the 2015 Spock Days and drew a large crowd. Dyer is an accomplished speaker, writer, and presenter on the subject, and a household name in astronomy. He may be retired on paper but is busier than ever. With an ever-growing demand to get to know the skies, his new projects include marketing an e-book on nightscapes, teaching Northern Lights sessions in Churchill, Manitoba, and partnering with All-Star Telescopes (www.all-startetelescopes.com) near Didsbury, Alberta on specialty *Photoshop* astrophotography seminars. The Trek Station hopes to evolve into a permanent resource centre for astronomy enthusiasts, encompassing fellowships with other keen observers, a variety of equipment, and guidance by RASC heavy hitters like Dyer.

Vulcan made international headlines in 2009 when it attempted to host the premier of *Star Trek 1*. Though not successful, the effort was rewarded when Leonard Nimoy contacted the tourism centre and offered a compromise to then-tour co-ordinator Dayna Dickens. He arranged to have much of the town bused for a special pre-viewing courtesy of Paramount Pictures. As one of the participants, it was the treat of a lifetime. How many times will one be in a movie house where the whole village knows you? Nimoy visited the town personally a year later in April 2010. Media from around the world came to see the event, and he spoke those famous words

I've been a Vulcan for 44 years. It's about time I came home. In all these experiences I've never had an experience quite as touching as I'm having here today and I appreciate it, thank you. May all of you live long and prosper.

Nimoy passed away in February this year, 50 years after the launch of *Star Trek*. The legacy he left behind is unsurpassed, but in addition, he gave a magnificent boost to all that had been done in Vulcan since its inception in 1903. Rumor has it they may still use cameos of Nimoy for future movies, but ordinary folks here remember him for all his personal appearances. Nimoy really liked the town and wanted to be more

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involved before taking sick. His last tweet stamped Monday, 2015 February 23 at 12:36 a.m. read “A life is like a garden. Perfect moments can be had, but not preserved, except in memory. LLAP” Couldn’t be put better.

While the Calgary Centre and Vulcan tourism always seek better ways to serve, what matters is it all started with an idea and now has grown into a magnificent adventure. No one encouraged me but it would not have been possible if people were not willing to take a risk and explore the possibilities. The Village of Vulcan started a little over 100 years ago by the Canadian Pacific Railway as a station. No doubt it was very lonely, and the men at the time had big dreams. Vulcan today has a bright future thanks to the Calgary Centre and to Vulcan Tourism’s efforts. Some of those visions the men of old dreamed are coming true. If Leonard Nimoy could have sent one more tweet when asked about all this, I’m sure he would have found it “Fascinating!” ★

Neel Roberts is a tax professional by day and the Astronomy Co-ordinator at the Star Trek Station in Vulcan, Alberta. An RASC Calgary Centre member since 2009, Neel loves the great outdoors like quading, boating, and snowmobiling with friends on his farm or across remote areas of Western Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments. You can find out more about Vulcan and RASC participation at <http://calgary.rasc.ca/vulcan2015.htm>.