

Trek Centre hosts first public stargazing

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Six-year-old beaver Levi Kittleson checks out Jupiter Jan. 19 through a telescope set up at the Tourism and Trek Station with some assistance from Ken Hartung, one of several local astronomers who has helped introduce a monthly star gazing session at the Trek centre. Simon Ducatel Vulcan Advocate

So far, 2011 has been a good start for the Tourism and Trek Station in many ways. Not only is new staff looking after the world famous tourism centre, but the Trek Station now has a unique offering to the community.

For the first time in its 13 year history, the centre will now facilitate monthly observation evenings. The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC Calgary) has joined forces with Vulcan Tourism to give visitors one more reason to come to town.

About two dozen people braved the cold to launch the premier event, which happened Jan. 19.

Folks from as young as 5 were treated to a brief inside presentation followed with telescope viewing of the full Moon, Jupiter and more. Dawn Gadsby and Trish Standing kept participants warm with coffee, hot chocolate and deserts from Trish's Tasty Treats.

Tourism co-ordinator Catherine Pooley is amazed at the quick response she received considering how new the idea is.

She had just posted the idea on the Internet and within one day a Calgary school showed interest. Famed astronomer Alan Dyer of the Telus World of Science responded immediately by placing the occurrence on their calendar of events (www.astronomycalgary.com) where lots of city people surf. Dyer, who is well connected in the astronomy field, was delighted to post the happenings on all other networks like Twitter and has pledged his future support.

Aaron Grant brought his entire cub troop the minute he heard about it. Also attending were two beavers and a scout. "It's great because this is now a local way the kids can earn a badge towards astronomy," Grant said.

Technical experts Ken Hartung and Karl Iverson operated the telescope while helping the cubs earn that badge.

Former RASC Calgary president Roland Dechesne has also been helping behind the scenes. He brings years of experience in running a national astronomy club, which doesn't come easy. Dechesne has not only helped design the new logo but is mustering up interest from RASC for funding and using their resources to promote the Vulcan event. Ben Heide of BCC Hardware, who has always provided logistical support to the Trek centre, also assisted in setting this project up.

The Trek Station plans to have the next meeting this Friday at 6 p.m. for one to two hours. The presentation will start with a brief discussion followed by observing with telescopes and binoculars supplied. The Trek Station plans to post the events on its website and will also be mentioned beforehand in the monthly column Sky's the Limit.

There's no cost, refreshments are supplied with full facilities, and all are welcome. For further information contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994. Also, the website www.vulcantourism.com will be updated regularly!