THE NIGHT SKY CONSERVATION PROGRAM

TESTIMONIALS

The following testimonials were taken from actual written statements from NSC Sky Tour attendees and NSC Astronomy Course students from May 2007 to November 2009:

Since the Spring of 2008 I have taken part in the Mill of Kintail's "Night Sky Conservation Program" – a set of weekly lectures on our skies conducted by Mr. Michael Earl of the Canadian Astronomy, Satellite Tracking and Optical Research (CASTOR) project. The evening lectures, when possible, are coupled with adventurous tours of the sky to observe satellites (including the International Space Station), our moon, planets, stars, nebulae, galaxies, and as much of the universe as we can see terrestrially. In addition, each session includes one or two "star parties" when many of us in the program – plus other interested persons (families, children, etc) – come out to take a look at what lies beyond. To say that it has opened up a whole new world – for us, for them - is a simple and inadequate understatement.

The session in 2008 was only given in the Spring whereas 2009 included sessions in both the Spring and the Fall. Some might ask "why two sessions" and the answer to that is simple. The sky is so very different as we pass from one season to another – as the earth moves in its orbit around the sun – so it's an entirely new adventure – as the sun, planets, and the rest of the universe seem to move around us.

The night sky lectures, complemented by the opportunity to look into the near and deep skies, might well be conducted in a highly theoretical manner yet the way the information is presented is so that the ordinary person can comprehend it – no complicated mathematical formulae or detailed knowledge or understanding of astrophysics is necessary, just an interest in our skies. While it's not appropriate for very young children, each session I've attended has included one or more teenage children as well as several adults – and the star parties have brought out much younger children as their parents try to explain the wonders of our universe.

Although the numbers are small (typically 12-15 attendees, some of whom are repeaters), the Mill of Kintail's "Night Sky Conservation Program" is a wonderful program for teenagers and adults alike – whether or not they have their own telescopes. It's a great learning opportunity in that in teaches, not only about our universe, but also about conservation and the unfortunate impact of light pollution on our society.
I hope the program continues because, once (or twice or three times) is not enough.

Sincerely,

Ken Bowering

I took the Spring 2009 Night Sky Conservation and astronomy course with the expectation of understanding the night sky as we can see it from our northern latitude and gaining some basic astronomical knowledge. The course exceeded my expectations due to the professionalism and dedication of our instructor Michael Earl, bridging real time observation and outdoor instruction with classroom lectures encouraging class dialogue and debate. The course was so enjoyable and stimulating that I enrolled in the Fall 2009 session, gaining new friends who share a common interest, so I plan to return in the Spring of 2010.

It's a double-edged sword. Without Mississippi Valley Conservation, there would be no course and without the course many would miss the tangible experience of the natural beauty of the Mill of Kintail conservation area, why it exists and that it takes money to keep it operating.

While I contributed a small sum to the MVC, I actively encourage friends to take the courses, visit the Mill of Kintail museum and hike along its trails as I frequently do. I sincerely hope the courses will continue for others to enjoy, to understand the importance of preserving our night sky and supporting organizations like Mississippi Valley Conservation.

Stephen Collie

I started the class with almost no understanding of our sky. I could identify the "Big Dipper" but had no idea where it was located. The words galaxy, solar system and super-nova were simply that, words. I had no real understanding of how, what, where or why each of these words interacted or related to the other words. My questions must have been very basic and reflective of my lack of knowledge.

As an instructor, you were successful in coordinating a class of adults at very different levels of knowledge and understanding and, I believe, keeping it interesting for all. Your presentations were professional, informative and current. Jacqui and I found ourselves scouring the newspapers to get a jump on the week's astronomy related stories.

You really managed to tweak a desire to learn more about astronomy. Jacqui and I have purchased several books at the beginner level and are slowly developing a very basic understanding. You will be pleased to know that quite often, during our reading, your name has come up…

For reasons outlined above, please keep us posted on the status of the 2010 Night Sky Conservation Program. We are most interested in attending; I definitely need more help.

Myles Henderson

Thank you for introducing some of us to Astronomy in a way that makes it not only fascinating but also understandable!!. Your enthusiasm is contagious

Amelia Booth

This is just a quick note to thank you for hosting the astronomy course and star parties at the Mill again this year. My daughter, Jennifer, and I have attended these events for the last two years and have found them to be both enjoyable and educational.

In fact, these events have inspired us to purchase a telescope of our own to continue our exploration of the night sky. While my interest is purely as a hobby, Jennifer is now 16 and making decisions about her future. She is strongly leaning towards higher education and a career in science or engineering. I am sure that attending these events and seeing the hands on application of these fields, as well as the lectures that show how deep the science can go, has helped her in making these choices.

I would also like to commend your course instructor and star part host, Mike Earl. I don't know which is greater, his knowledge of astronomy or his enthusiasm for it. He is an excellent teacher and always willing, and able, to answer any question. I have seen him talk about astronomy to everyone from a three year old, to someone with a PhD in Physics, and each time the person learns something new and gains more interest in the subject.

Finally, I should thank you for your efforts in conserving the night sky at the Mill of Kintail against light pollution. It is truly a breath taking and awe inspiring sight. I believe the best way to educate people about the effects of light pollution is for them to see what the sky can look like without it.

My daughter and I are already looking forward to attending more events next year. Thanks again,

David Putnam

Based on the bad forecast, I had planned to not go to Mike Earl's MOK star party. However, at 19:00 I happened to look outside. To my complete surprise, the sky was beautifully clear. I asked 'Hey, what kind of weather-magic does Earl have? Hmm. I want some!' In any case, I hurriedly tossed scope, tripod and eyepiece box in my car and drove to MOK.

As I drove, a distant cloud bank got higher and higher. But I regularly caught glimpses of a clearing low on the western horizon. But when I arrived, the sky was overcast. Worse observing field was devoid of people. Though there were two lonely scopes setup.

I figured the people must be in the gatehouse. There I found Mike Earl and four other people. Mike setup his "plan b". It was a slide show of his astro-, satellite and sky photos. He proceeded to entertain his small audience with the enthusiasm that Mike is famous for. Quite of bit of the interested came from the fact that Mike used only photographs that he made himself. He made it pretty clear that anyone could do the same. I left about two hours later because i was feeling worn-out from a tough week at work. But Mike tirelessly continued to enthuse for his audience well after he ran out of slides. They seemed amused.

I guess a bad sky does not ruin a star party.

Attilla Danko