

Thursday, 09 May 2013 09:21

Stargazing a popular event in Vulcan

Written by Stephanie Labbe



Telescopes expert Karl Iverson Jr. sets up equipment for public viewing at the March 8 Vulcan Stargazing event.

Photo submitted

Looking at the night sky has turned into a monthly event in Vulcan with stargazing events held every second Friday.

Neel Roberts, the tourism astronomy co-ordinator, wanted to start an event where people can gather and look at the stars and planets through telescopes and learn more about them. 1998 was the year the Star Trek Centre was being built and since that was being discussed, Roberts came up with an idea to incorporate some stargazing events with experts on hand for people to gaze up at the night sky through telescopes. It gives people something different to do while learning about astronomy.

It took a few years to gain a following, but now it's going strong.

"I think astronomy is fascinating to everybody. When you look up at the night sky, you just can't help to wonder what all is up there and how do people figure out what is a star, what is a planet and how they're all arranged," says Roberts.

He has always had a passion for astronomy and gazing up at the night sky and thought it would fit perfectly with the community's brand to start stargazing events.

It helps to have experts on hand at these events who answer any questions people may have and guide people through what they're seeing through the telescopes.

"Anybody can look up at the night sky, but if you have telescopes and a resource of experts to help you, it makes it easier," says Roberts.

People who attend the events can bring along their own telescopes, but generally the event provides everything needed. There's a short presentation at the beginning with snacks provided.

About four or five telescopes are set up outside for people to use following the presentation. Roberts says they have different sizes of telescopes from 11 inches to small binoculars.

"So, a person can choose to participate with no effort on their part, or they can go all the way. There's people that bring a truck load of telescopes," says Roberts.

Generally, these events begin at 7 p.m. on the second Friday of each month.

The beginning presentation is always different and can be on anything regarding the night sky. The events are free of charge.

"We try to keep people up to date on the monthly events, but sometimes we'll just choose a topic. For example, it was Easter at the beginning of the month (April) and so we'll talk about Easter," says Roberts.

The presentations take place in the bridge section of the Trek Centre.

"I had tried to convince Vulcan tourism that it would be very good, not only for the Town of Vulcan, but for the outside in general, because the town does host Spock Days once a year, but we offer more and people seem to have a natural inclination to know that Star Trek is more than just a TV show," says Roberts. "I think it was just a natural match between the people who wanted to start it and the people who were hungry to learn more that just started it going and it's been going very well every month."

The event usually draws between 25 to 30 people, but this past February it brought in around 100 people. Roberts and fellow tourism staff hosting the event were surprised when they saw cars fill up the parking lot and spill onto the street for these events.

December 2010 was the first event. Today, it is put on by Vulcan Tourism and the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) Calgary.
