

Galilean Nights Event ID: gn13

Number of telescopes: 5

Number of organisers: 3

Number of attendees: 70

Event Report:

Galilean Nights Star Party Report

Our star party was held at the Sylvan Learning Center in suburban Harrisburg, PA. We had planned a smaller star party for "100 Hours of Astronomy," but we were rained out. We did, however, have some successful indoor activities. Thus, we saw Galilean Nights as a second chance for a star party. We held it on Thursday, October 22. Thursday dawned cloudy, but we went ahead with plans. By 4:30 PM, all of the telescopes were set up, with the clouds starting to part. Then, by the time students started coming out to the telescopes (about 5:20 PM), a growing clear spot revealed the moon, and from then on it was clear sailing.

We had just a few weeks earlier joined a local merchant's association, and it turned out that they had scheduled a Fall Festival to start on Friday, October 23, so we suggested using our star party as a kick-off. They agreed, and we got some very good free publicity. We are now planning an annual Fall star party.

We used five telescopes:

- 8-inch Newtonian (homebuilt)
- 6-inch Newtonian (homebuilt)
- 4.5-inch Meade "smart scope"
- 3-inch Edmund Scientific "Space Conqueror"
- 3-inch Celestron "FirstScope"

All of the telescopes were staffed. We called our staffers "Galilean Knights," and each wore a white baseball cap with a "Galilean Knight" patch so they could be identified by our visitors. The 4.5-inch was located in front of our building to attract passer-by traffic. Many of the people who came deliberately for the star party stopped at the 4.5-inch first for a look at Jupiter.

The other telescopes were located in our much darker "backyard," which was surrounded by "Caution" tape for the event. Visitors passed through our building, where there were refreshments, a Powerpoint presentation about Jupiter, and photographs of the objects we were looking at (Jupiter, three of its Galilean moons, and our moon). The refreshments were all astronomically oriented (Milky Way® candy bars, Starburst®, Moonpies®, star, moon and astronaut cookies, Sunchips®, Starcrunch® cookies, and Eclipse® and Orbit® gum).

We had about 70 attendees, including some of our students and teachers, small groups of Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, 2nd Graders from St. Theresa School and their parents, and general public. Our estimate of attendance came from tickets we gave at the front door and individual counts. Only two visitors seemed to be amateur astronomers; the rest were just folks who came to look through a telescope.

Our primary goal was that of IYA2009: to allow as many people as possible to look through an astronomical telescope. All reactions from visitors were positive, with many voicing surprise that they could actually see Jupiter and its moons, and that our moon really does have craters. A number were also surprised, when we pointed out Jupiter in the sky, that it appeared so bright. A few were very interested that the two largest telescopes were homebuilt.