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SCIENCE FOUNDATION ARIZONA HOSTS “GALILEOSCOPE STAR PARTY” FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Event to Promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Statewide

(Phoenix, AZ) - Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) and the National Optical Astronomy Observatory (NOAO) will welcome students and state elected officials this evening for a twilight “Star Party,” where 5th - 8th grade students from Southern and Central Arizona will observe the moon, stars and planets through “Galileoscopes” they have constructed themselves. Galileoscopes, named after the 17th century father of astronomy, Galileo Galilei, are low-cost, yet powerful telescopes built by students and used in conjunction with a science and astronomy curriculum to teach children important concepts in science, optics (the science of light) and mathematics.

Through its Arizona Hands-On Optics program, funded by Science Foundation Arizona, NOAO works with afterschool programs to increase students’ interest in science, first by building the Galileoscopes from a kit, then on lessons using the scopes to learn science and math concepts while exploring how telescopes work or in observing the night sky through class projects and Star Party events. More than 180,000 Galileoscopes have been produced and distributed across the country thus far.

Astronomy and its related fields in space science are important to the state’s economy. According to a 2008 study by the Arizona Arts, Sciences and Technology Academy found astronomy, space and planetary sciences generated nearly \$253 million for the state’s economy in 2006. Arizona is a world-class center with nearly \$1 billion in capital investment in these fields to date.

“Not only do these sciences help build a skill set that students will need to effectively compete in the 21st century marketplace, they contribute to the state’s economy by generating millions of dollars in much-needed revenue each year,” said Gov. Jan Brewer. “Employers need and will continue to seek a workforce that is well-versed in science and math, and individuals that can work in a team to solve problems in an efficient manner.”

"Getting children involved in programs that stimulate their interest in core academics, especially STEM subjects, is particularly important to their ability to understand, use and expand their knowledge," said Mesa Representative Richard Crandall, Chair of the Arizona House Education Committee.

“Astronomy can inspire, fuel creativity and spur on new ideas that can evolve into the solutions for the problems of today and those that will arise tomorrow,” said William Harris, President and CEO of SFAz. “The use of these project-based programs will prove to help students develop the observational and critical thinking skills necessary for our future leaders.”

“With these Galileoscopes, teachers have a new tool to promote math and science literacy and to illuminate the scientific process,” said Stephen Pompea, manager of the National Observatory’s education programs and a team leader of the Galileoscope project. “Students in any part of Arizona, from the center of Phoenix to the most rural areas can now make their own observations of the Moon and planets and pursue authentic and rigorous scientific investigations.”

“STEM education is only going to become more critical and challenging in the coming years,” said Darcy Renfro, Vice President and Director of STEM Initiatives at SFAz. “These hands-on opportunities in science and math are important before students reach high school, enabling them to learn science and math skills in context that will better prepare them for college and careers.”

The SFAz Galileoscope Star Party coincides with the 50th anniversary of NOAO’s Kitt Peak National Observatory, located in Southern Arizona and one of the most important observatories in the world. Arizona is also home to Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, where the dwarf planet Pluto was discovered in 1930 and to the Large Binocular Telescope at Mt. Graham International Observatory.

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About Science Foundation Arizona: Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initiated in 2006 by the Greater Phoenix Leadership Inc., Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Flagstaff Forty in conjunction with the executive and legislative branches of state government. SFAz serves as a catalyst for high-wage, knowledge-based jobs and economic diversity through administration and strict oversight of research, development and education grants to public education and other non-profit research performing institutions. For more information, visit www.sfaz.org.

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