

Island Astronomy  
Institute

# OBSERVER

Winter 2006

This quiet time of year brought us two steps forward as an Institution. In January, we requested our final 501(c)3 Determination Letter from the IRS. Based on our membership level, the hard work and accomplishments of our Board of Directors, our accountant recommended we proceed directly to this final IRS stage in non-profit status after just 16 months! If the IRS determination is favorable, we will be able to stand fully independent of our financial affiliation with the Maine Space Grant Consortium.

Our second goal was to win the Maine Space Grant Consortium's Higher Education Competition to fund a partnership with the College of the Atlantic. Our "Perspectives on Astronomy Collaborative for Undergraduate and Educational Studies" won the full award of \$5000. According to the MSGC our project was "strong, and worthwhile" due to its "technical merit and alignment with the needs of NASA and the State of Maine". The award helps establish the "Philosophy of Astronomy", a new undergraduate offering at COA this spring, and supports work with COA's Educational Studies Department to refine the astronomy program started at Pemetic.

The purpose of the collaboration with COA is to investigate new approaches to programming for students and teachers that focuses on the essential perspectives astronomy contributes to the modern scientific worldview. Our goal is to make discovering how science really works irresistible to students. Already we see evidence of the special way astronomy inspires the natural curiosity of children in ways they care about.

Our Winter Lecture Series is now in its third year of helping to fight cabin fever. This year we have added three lectures that examine the role of technology in space; "Astronomy Discoveries of 2005", "Communication Satellites", and "Eyes in Space: A history of Exploration". For adults seeking an escape from home, we offered "Armchair Astronomy" through MDI Adult Education. With the expansion of our programs to the college level, it is only natural that we become active at the MDI High School. To get this ball rolling we are mentoring a Senior Exhibition project to investigate the mystery of dark energy and its implications on modern cosmology.

In February we will be offering programs to the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at Mount Desert Elementary School in Northeast Harbor. Our 4<sup>th</sup> grade visit is the direct result of our Winter Lecture Series, which inspired a student to call the Institute to request that we come visit his class. He and his classmates had a wonderful time exploring the origins of the moon through the story of NASA's Apollo missions, in a program developed at Pemetec.

As we turn our attention to spring, your continued support remains essential to our plans for summer. We are particularly grateful to those of you who made year-end donations on your own initiative. In our application to the IRS, we requested permanent status as a publicly supported charity. It is your record of support that the IRS is now reviewing. At the end of the day, it is the inspiring curiosity of 4<sup>th</sup> graders, combined with your generous contributions that make the Institute possible.

On behalf of the Board, we thank you for all you help make possible.

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Peter W. Lord  
Director  
Island Astronomy Institute

