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A Worldwide Astronomy MARATHON

Grab your scopes and friends and head outside! Early April will be amateur astronomy's time to shine for the International Year of Astronomy 2009.



If you have a telescope, mark April 2–5 on your calendar. The world is coming your way.

An unprecedented string of public skywatching events will be packed into this brief period, all designed to engage people and bring them out for a worldwide star party that will cap the program on Saturday evening, April 4th.

Collectively, the period is called “100 Hours of Astronomy.” It’s a Cornerstone Project of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (January issue, page 82) tailor-made for amateurs who’d like to try some outreach. During the final 24 hours a global

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JOIN THE PARTY It will be a worldwide celebration April 2–5, as the International Year of Astronomy marks 100 Hours of Astronomy with public viewing, live webcasts, and much more. The party atmosphere could exceed this 2008 observing event in New Zealand, which was punctuated with neighboring fireworks.

star party will sweep around the world, with local gatherings beginning as darkness descends. Even city street corners will come alive, with the third annual International Sidewalk Astronomy Night happening the first weekend in April. Thus many sidewalk astronomy regulars will already be at their stations.

Get Involved

This will be the largest amateur astronomy outreach event ever held, and everyone with a telescope is needed. Whether you’re an expert or a newbie yourself, whether your scope gets used regularly or has been relegated to a garage or closet, someone new should get their chance to see the heavens up close with it. It’s an experience everyone should have.

Visit the website for 100 Hours of Astronomy at

100hoursofastronomy.org and you'll find resources for novice and experienced sidewalk astronomers alike. It offers tips on where to set up, how to advertise your event, what questions to expect (and how to answer them), and more. Stargazers have been registering their events on the website. The resulting listings and maps point the public to local events, allow you to find a nearby group to team up with if you wish, and expedite collaboration between groups. And be sure to sign up for our mailing list.

The 100 Hours of Astronomy will kick off on Thursday, April 2nd, at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia with the opening of the exhibition *Galileo, the Medici, and the Age of Astronomy*. The show features many Galileo artifacts, including one of the instruments that started it all 400 years ago: an actual telescope that Galileo built and used to take humanity's first steps beyond naked-eye stargazing (see the box at right).

This VIP event will be webcast to the world and will set the tone for the rest of the program. Over the ensuing four days we'll make the 400-year journey from Galileo to modern-day telescopes — and back to the thrill of Galileo's discoveries at the eyepiece.

Launch and Beyond

Online presentations will then continue, as experts from various science centers line up to discuss hot topics in astronomy while visitors pose questions. At some facilities, participants will have the opportunity to operate telescopes remotely over the Internet.

The professional astronomy community takes the stage next. A live 24-hour webcast will follow darkness around the world, welcoming viewers inside the domes of dozens of research observatories where astronomers will explain their work. Scientists at control centers for space telescopes will also join in.

Other outreach groups will take advantage of the high profile of 100 Hours of Astronomy. The radio telescopes of the European VLBI Network will conduct demonstrations and live observing by following a celestial object, in real

The Galilean Experience

The Franklin Institute's exhibition, *Galileo, the Medici, and the Age of Astronomy*, will run from April 4th through September 7th. It marks the first — and perhaps only — time one of the two surviving telescopes (shown at right) that Galileo used has left Italy. The exhibit will also feature other artifacts of the Medici family, who supported Galileo in his many scientific pursuits during the Renaissance.

You'll find visiting information, as well as details of the exhibit and associated programs, at www.fi.edu.



FRANKLIN INSTITUTE

time, that actually changes over short timescales. It'll be astronomy in motion.

Yuri's Night, an annual celebration of the anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's first human flight into space, is usually held worldwide on April 12th. To avoid Easter this year it was moved up to April 4th, coinciding with 100 Hours. Many of these celebrations of humanity's entry into space will welcome amateur astronomers who offer to take participants on their own personal voyages of cosmic discovery.

We encourage amateurs not to wait their turn, though! Contact schools, museums, hospitals, military bases, and other venues and offer to host star parties throughout the weekend. Find those who can't take advantage of this great opportunity and bring telescopes to them.

And don't forget that half of those 100 hours are during the daytime. The website has tips on solar viewing and science from the Solar Physics Task Group of IYA2009.

Plans are still in the works as this issue goes to press. Check the website for the full schedule — it's the portal to everything happening worldwide.

All of this leads up to the grand finale: the 24-hour global star party that sweeps around the world as the Sun sets on April 4th. Everyone who watched the events unfold online will be encouraged to leave their computers behind and see the first-quarter Moon and Saturn up close, as Galileo did for the first time four centuries ago.

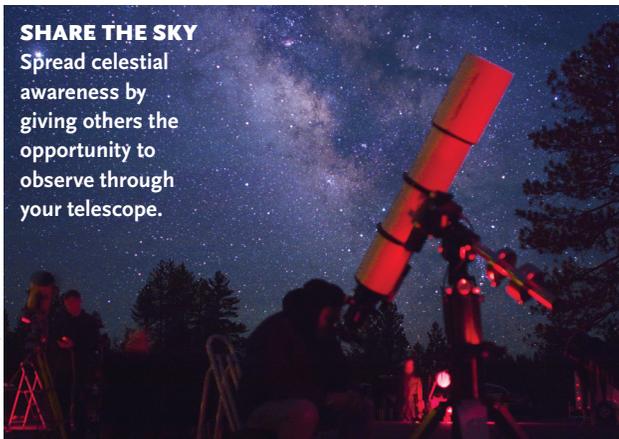
The 100 Hours of Astronomy has something for everyone: new sidewalk astronomers, experienced outreach specialists, and anyone who's ever wondered what the Moon really looks like. This is an opportunity 400 years in the making. It's not likely to be repeated soon. ♦

For links to the various projects and other resources for the International Year of Astronomy, visit SkyandTelescope.com/IYA2009.

Mike Simmons is co-chair of the 100 Hours of Astronomy Cornerstone Project and president of Astronomers Without Borders (astronomerswithoutborders.org).

SHARE THE SKY

Spread celestial awareness by giving others the opportunity to observe through your telescope.



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