

# AOC NEWS

Vol. 5 - Issue 3 / JUNE 2003

## NOTES FROM THE A.D.

From June 8 through June 12, a scientific symposium will be held in Socorro. The symposium, entitled "Future Directions in High Resolution Astronomy" will be a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the VLBA, the only dedicated instrument of its kind in all of astronomy. Later this summer, in mid-August, there will be an NRAO event to celebrate the 10th anniversary. This will bear some similarities to the VLA 20th birthday party at the VLA site, but will be a smaller event held in the vicinity of the Array Operations Center in Socorro. More details will be forthcoming.

After spending too much time closeted in my office dealing with budgets, I've managed to get out to visit three of the ten VLBA stations in the last couple weeks: Pie Town, Kitt Peak, and Los Alamos. All are well-kept and fully operational; their performance over the past 10 years is a tribute to all the personnel who have been working on keeping the VLBA a smoothly functioning instrument. Thanks to all of you, and special thanks to the station technicians for all their hard work.

The NRAO has issued three scientific press releases in May 2003, including two in conjunction with the 202nd American Astronomical Society Meeting in Nashville. We expect more press releases on VLBA results from the symposium mentioned above. To see the releases and associated images, go to the NRAO home page on the web and click on "Press Releases"

The new gift shop at the VLA Visitor Center is nearly complete. Thanks to everyone who has been associated with this upgrade, and special thanks to Robyn Harrison for having the vision and perseverance to make this happen. We plan to have the gift shop staffed on a regular basis very soon.

And finally, welcome to all the summer students, and good luck with your summer research activities!

Jim Ulvestad

**C**ONGRATULATIONS recipients and parents of the 2003-2004 AUI Scholarship. This year's winners are: Samuel Claussen, son of Mark and Sarah Claussen; Karen Cotter, daughter of Terry and Susie Cotter; Vanessa Doyle, daughter of Christine Wingenter; and Laura Glendenning, daughter of Brian and Marie Glendenning. Best wishes for a bright future.

## WELCOME ABOARD

Douglas Gerrard, Electronics Division; Isidro Madril and Pete Valencia, EVLA; Co-op Students in Electronics, Sumita Choudhary, Kurt Caviggia; Jason Ye, Data Management; Kenneth Ramey ALMA; Tiffany Borders, Katie Chynoweth, Christopher Clearfield, Richard C. Emily Landes, Chun Ly, Holly Maness, Itziar Monsalvo de Gregorio, Miranda Nordhaus, Alicia Söderberg, Laura Spittler, NRAO

Summer Students; and Matt Williams, participant of the RET (Research Experiences for Teachers program).

## VLBA 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It has been nearly ten years since the VLBA was inaugurated on August 20, 1993. Two different events are occurring this summer to celebrate this anniversary.

We will be seeing signs of the first of these events around the AOC in the very near future. A scientific conference sponsored by NRAO and New Mexico Tech and titled "Future Directions in High Resolution Astronomy", will be held in Socorro June 8 - 12, 2003. The meeting had to be fitted in among other scientific events worldwide, especially the International Astronomical Union's General Assembly, so it was not possible to make its date coincide very well with the actual 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VLBA.

The major themes of the meeting include the scientific progress in astronomy, astrophysics, and geophysics to which the VLBA has contributed, future frontiers for VLBI and other high resolution techniques, and the technological developments that will be necessary. The informal initiating committee that began organizing this meeting in the AOC last year set a priority of including numerous lectures by younger astronomers, and the Scientific Organizing Committee, chaired by Mark Reid, has implemented this goal admirably. Further information on the meeting is available at: [www.aoc.nrao.edu/events/VLBA10th/](http://www.aoc.nrao.edu/events/VLBA10th/)

The scientific sessions for the conference will be held in New Mexico Tech's Workman Center, so the primary sign that will be visible at the AOC may be an absence of many members of the scientific staff. Members of the technical staff will also be attending some of the sessions on future instrumentation.

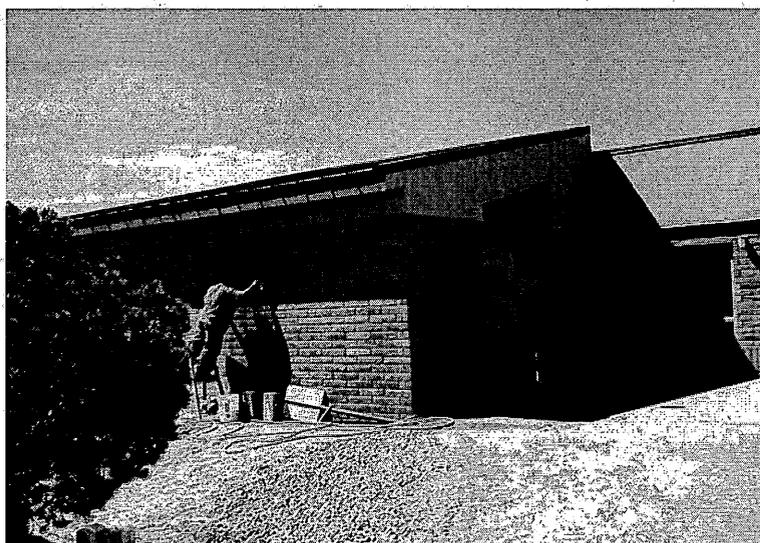
The second commemorative event will occur later in the summer, much closer to the actual anniversary of the VLBA's inauguration. This celebration will be open to all NRAO New Mexico employees. It will be held at the AOC, and arrangements will be made to enable people who normally work at the VLA site to attend. Further plans will be developed after the June scientific meeting is over, but please, **SAVE THIS DATE:** Thursday, August 21, 2003.

Jon Romney, Chair of the Local Organizing Committee

## COMING SOON...THE VLA GIFT SHOP

Those of you who have had the opportunity to visit the VLA Visitor Center recently have noticed that, amid the dust and debris, a new room has been added. It will contain a gift shop, to open some time in June. The shop will operate seven days a week from 9:00 - 4:00 p.m., with Prescilla Mauldin acting as Senior Sales Clerk.

Currently the visitor center is not staffed. The primary objective of adding the gift shop is to fund someone to be there to answer tourists' questions. While this will require the staff to learn much more than just the cashiering and stocking duties, it will help us meet our goal of



VLA Visitor Center taking on a new look!

enhancing the visitors' experiences. In return, we hope visitors will help enhance our Visitor Center's coffers! Proceeds from the gift shop revenue will pay salaries, and upgrade exhibits.

Besides the giftshop addition, the restrooms in the visitor center were remodeled to meet ADA (American with Disabilities Act) standards. The north window overlooking the Small Radio Telescope was replaced, along with the north door. The track crew and the carpenters have done an outstanding job picking up where the contractor left off, putting in a new patio, doing finish work, and creating the most incredible hard-packed walking trail from the control building to the visitor center. Thanks to everyone who has helped make this happen.

Robyn Harnson

## VLA NEWS

The fiber crew is working on the east arm, soon to cross the SEC power lines, that feed the VLA site and all of southwestern New Mexico. The track crew is already replacing ties on the west arm. The Carpentry crew has been working at the AOC and the Visitor Center, trying to keep up with all the work requests. The auto shop has been

very busy trying to keep all of our ancient equipment running and doing modifications to meet our needs!

Other than that, it has been relatively quiet out here!

Pat Lewis

## JUNE SKIES

This month we say farewell to Saturn as the ringed planet reaches conjunction with the Sun on the 24th. It will still be visible just above the western horizon for about ½ hour after sunset during the first few days of the month. Binoculars may be necessary just to find it!

Jupiter, on the other hand is still relatively high in the early evening sky and will be visible for most of the evening throughout the month. But, it too is fading fast and we'll have to look elsewhere for planetary excitement.

Mars will likely furnish that excitement, as it steadily brightens throughout the month. By the end of the month, at magnitude -1.4, fiery Mars will rival blue-white Sirius in brightness. By the 20th Mars will appear larger than it ever became during the 1990s! During June it will be large enough so that observers with small telescopes should easily be able to pick out surface features on steady nights. The best viewing will be when the "Red Planet" is highest just before morning twilight.

The moon will be 1st quarter on the 7th, full on the 14th, last quarter on the 21st and new on the 29th. The Sun reaches the summer solstice, for the northern hemisphere, on June 21st, at 1:10 PM MDT. This also marks the winter solstice for the southern hemisphere.

As the summer constellations approach we enter the time of year when, on moonless nights, galaxy hunting with small telescopes can be very fruitful. Finding the Big Dipper, we are reminded to arc to Arcturus and speed on to Spica! This brings us to the constellation Virgo the virgin. It is also home to the Virgo Cluster of galaxies. From Spica, head a few degrees north and west toward Leo, just west of Epsilon Virginis (at magnitude 2.8, the third brightest star in Virgo). Scanning this area with a 6 to 8 inch telescope and a moderate eyepiece should reward you with glimpses of many galaxies in this rich cluster. The brighter members of this cluster make up 10 of the 109 Messier objects! Good hunting!

Jon Spargo, New Mexico Tech Astronomy Club

## REMINDER - SUMMER PICNIC

You're invited to a picnic sponsored by the New Mexico Personnel Recreation Association (PRA)! Please join us for the First Day of Summer Celebration Picnic on Saturday, June 21st at Sedillo Park from 10:00 - to 4:00 p.m. Burgers and hotdogs will be personally grilled by your friendly PRA Board Members. All the fixings will be provided by KFC!

There will be tons of games for kids and adults to enjoy! Not enough, you say? Classic Sweets will be providing a jumping balloon and snow cones to beat the summertime heat!

Tickets are \$5.00 for adults - hey, we can't go too far in the red here and all kids, of course, get in for free. Each kiddo will receive a goody bag filled with a plethora of toys and candy and we'll be giving away a few very nice door prizes for you kids at heart!

Ticket price too steep for ya? Come down to the park early (around 8:00 a.m.), and help us set up the tent or, help us clean up afterwards and you get your ticket **for free!** Remember, we are a volunteer organization on a **very tight** budget, so any help is sincerely appreciated! It's going to be a whole lot of fun, so bring the family to Sedillo Park and celebrate summertime! See you there!

Dennis Walsh