

# AOC NEWS



Comments and contributions are welcomed. Please contact Terry Romero  
Vol. 2 - Issue 3 / June 2000

## LOS ALAMOS VLBA STATION AND THE CERRO GRANDE FIRE.

The LA/VLBA antenna is located on property of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) at a remote site known as Tech Area 33. This area is about 10 miles southeast of Los Alamos and four miles south of White Rock. Station Site Techs, Gene Dunn and Paul Johnson share the following on the recent fire tragedy in the area.

On Friday, May 5, 2000, we noticed a fire on Cerro Grande, a mountain about 11 miles to the west of us. We later learned that the staff at Bandelier National Monument had started a controlled burn. The fire soon raged out of control.

On Sunday morning May 7, a U.S. Forest Service ranger came by Paul Johnson's home located in the Jemez Mountains and said it would be a good idea to leave the area. The fire had jumped State Road 4, closing off the road from his home to Los Alamos and the VLBA site. Paul and family spent an hour packing up what they would need for a few days away from home. Two cars loaded with their two boys, their belongings, and a dog, then started out for his in-laws' home near Pojoaque. Normally it is a 50 mile drive, but with the road to Los Alamos closed we had to drive the long way around, about 150 miles. A few hours later driving up Interstate 25 toward Santa Fe, we could clearly see the flames of the fire 25 miles away. By Sunday afternoon, the parts of Los Alamos bordering on the National Forest were being evacuated. Paul wasn't too worried about the antenna, or his house, as the winds here normally blow out of the southwest, blowing the fire away from either place.

Monday, May 8, LANL was closed. Not being part of LANL, we went to work anyway. At about 11:00 A.M., we were discovered by an LANL employee checking the area and were told to leave. A deal was worked out so we could

come in for one hour per day to change tapes. Tapes were changed on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, but by Wednesday afternoon, the entire town was ordered to evacuate. We met in Pojoaque, to get the last tape so it could be sent out from Santa Fe. Many evacuees went to friends and shelters in White Rock. Fearing loss of communications, we consulted with Paul Rhodes and it was decided to stow the antenna.

Gene went to his two bedroom place in Santa Fe where he was joined by an evacuee. About 1:30 AM, Thursday, May 11, the town of White Rock was ordered to evacuate and other friends called needing a place to stay. At 5:30 A.M., two women, three teenagers, three dogs, two cats, twenty-five exotic birds and three hermit crabs arrived seeking shelter. Total evacuation from the area had now reached about 20,000 people. The road was blocked to White Rock and we could not get to the site.

Power failed at the VLBA site that afternoon for about one-half hour. Then the internet connection failed. Dial up lines for backup modems got flaky and were up and down. Paul called the LANL power dispatcher to be sure power was on and got an independent confirmation from a LANL employee, who was allowed to go to the site. Our main concern was the maser on which we were not able to perform an emergency shutdown. Occasionally, the phone lines worked. Our time was spent keeping in touch with each other and Paul Rhodes, calling the LANL power dispatcher and watching the continuous TV coverage.

On Saturday, May 13, Paul and his family were allowed to return home, but had to go via the 150 mile route since State Road 4 was still closed. We kept in touch via our cell phones. On Sunday, May 14, evacuees were allowed to return to White Rock. Meanwhile at Gene's place, one bird had received a serious leg injury that might require amputation, so house guests

had to remain. LANL, however, kept the Lab closed and no one was allowed to enter the area. By Monday, May 15, it was determined the injured bird's leg had to be amputated. Since the emergency veterinarian's assistant was gone and other veterinarians were swamped dealing with the tremendous influx of evacuated animals, Gene dredged up his past biomedical training and assisted the emergency veterinarian with the amputation. That afternoon Los Alamos evacuees returned. Since the bird was now doing well, Gene's house guests departed to Los Alamos and White Rock.

On Wednesday, May 17, Paul returned to his in-laws hoping the Lab would open soon and he would be able to get to the site without a 350 mile commute. Thursday, the Lab remained closed, but State Road 4 was opened and he was able to return home via his normal route.

On Monday, May 22, we were finally allowed to return to the site at 11:00 A.M.. The phone lines were still intermittent and we still had no internet connection, but the site was in good condition. The VLBA Station's mascot ravens, Mo and Flo, were happy to once again receive their daily food and water rations. (this is Gene's project).

The fire had burned to within five miles of the site from the White Rock side and six mile from the Los Alamos side. Around 48,000 acres and 235 buildings, home and apartments were burned, leaving 405 families homeless. In addition, the hulks of numerous burned out cars and trucks line the streets of the northern and western parts of Los Alamos adding to the feeling that a war was fought here.

As we write this our phones have finally been fixed, but we still don't have

internet connection. The fire continues to have flare-ups and is not expected to be fully out until July. Across the valley a tremendous smoke column rises from a new fire behind Santa Fe. And it's only springtime! If and when we get our usual rains it will be a mixed blessing because the earth is baked now and there is no vegetation to hold back the runoff.

Paul Johnson & Gene Dunn

## SMALL POTATOES INVESTMENT CLUB

A year ago, a group of employees at the AOC got together to form an investment club. The main purpose was to learn about the stock market without risking a lot of money and to have fun with while at it. After the first year, I can say that the club has been a resounding success.

We started out with about a dozen members, and set about the task of doing some stock research. We first settled on the energy sector, when in early 1999, it had been badly beaten up with historically low oil prices. We picked a drilling company, Weatherford International, which over the last year has returned more than 100% on our original investment. Looking at other sectors, we saw intriguing possibilities in health care/biotech (we bought Amgen, now up >80%), computers (Gateway, also up >80%), and online financials (Knight/Trimark). This last stock was VERY educational, since originally it dropped over 50% from our purchase price. But we didn't panic, and realized it was unfairly beaten up, so we bought more at the depressed level, and overall it has done reasonably well since then (up around 30%, net). More recently, we have bought some retailers (Ultimate Electronics and Staples) and another tech stock (Xircom), all of which are up modestly, or flat. Overall, the club's investments have returned about 50% since inception, and this would have been even better if we had been able to keep our cash position smaller. But with so many members and only monthly meetings, sometimes it was hard to agree on a particular stock purchase, and several times stocks were suggested and discussed, often vigorously, only to be turned down in the final vote. But this has been good. I think it has been most instructive for our members when partners have taken opposing views on, say, the debate between value and growth investing, or conservative vs. aggressive styles of stock picking, or the merits of a particular company's story, and so on. The meetings are rather lively!

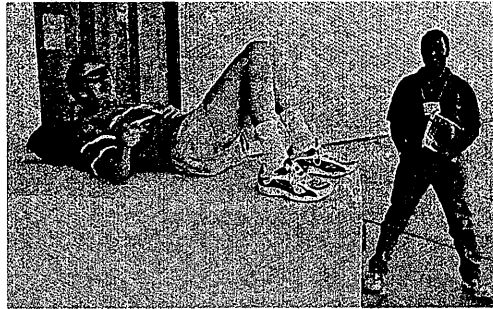
There are currently 16 members, and New Mexico law limits us to 20, so there are still some open slots for other partners, but membership is not limited to employees of NRAO: friends or family are also welcome. With monthly subscriptions being just \$20, it's a great way to learn about the investing fad without risking one's retirement! Contact Gustaaf van Moorsel

for more information.

Peter Barnes

## GAS AND GALAXY EVOLUTION

Over 180 astronomers converged on Socorro in late May for the conference on Gas and Galaxy Evolution, co-sponsored by NRAO and New Mexico Tech, in celebration of the VLA's 20th anniversary. The meeting kicked off with a Saturday afternoon reception at Macey Center; despite a gang of tough geese who laid



Jim Ulvestad & Eric Wicots take a break

claim to the nearby pond, everyone seemed to have a good time. The main part of the conference, held in NMT's Workman Center, lasted three and a half days, and featured over 70 talks and 80 posters. The conference was notable for attracting both theorists and observers, from a wide variety of fields, with about half the participants being young graduate students and postdocs.

The increasing inclusiveness of the field was seen in the number of professional women present, about a third of the total, as well as the many countries represented (nineteen!). Topics ranged from numerical simulations of galaxy formation, to optical & ultraviolet studies of the Lyman-alpha forest (absorption lines due to neutral gas seen against distant quasar), to the unexpected & peculiar gas distributions seen around galaxies in many VLA images. The "Weirdo Wall" realized a long-time dream of staff scientist John Hibbard (CV) to collect a large number of these images in one place.

One of the most famous of these galaxies, M81, was featured on the beautiful tee-shirts designed by Jansky fellows Tracy Clarke & Marc Verheijen, based on VLA data from staff scientist Min Su Yun. They were so popular, we're thinking of re-ordering them send email to tclarke@nrao.edu or mrupen@nrao.edu if you'd like one!

There were a number of social events associated with the conference, even astronomers can't work all the time! Much to the surprise of the hike leader (Gustaaf van Moorsel), the Monday 5:30 A.M. hike to the Bosque attracted some 40 participants, and most people even made it back to the morning session. The conference dinner was a celebration of New Mexican cuisine, with chicken, beef, and vegetarian fajitas, and lots

of sopapillas & honey; Socorro weather was as usual very cooperative, and we were able to sit outside watching the sun set. Tuesday was notable for the poster awards, which included a chile ristra for the hottest new result (Chris Mihos), for the evening discussion session on high velocity clouds. The conference concluded on Wednesday with a rousing summary by Linda Sparke, followed by the VLA 20th Anniversary Celebration.

Michael Rupen

## CELEBRATION TIME

The Conference came to an end and by 11:30 A.M., NRAO staff and conference participants boarded buses and headed to the VLA Site. As the buses approached the Visitor Center at the site, a herd of antelope grazed peacefully next to



Paul Vanden Bout, Jack Campbell, Jack Lancaster, Ron Ekers, Miller Goss and Dick Sramek pose in front of an antenna.

the roadway, much to the delight of visitors. Then on to the Antenna Assembly Barn, where everyone enjoyed a barbecue lunch. Brief speeches were presented by Paul Vanden Bout, Ron Ekers, Jacqueline van Gorkom and Miller Goss, followed by tours of the site. Approximately 400 people participated in the celebration of 20 years of operation with the VLA. Note: Check out The VLA Newsletter and the Point Source for details of the celebration.

Terry Romero

## CONGRATULATIONS

NM/NRAO Service Awards recipients:  
10 Yr. Chris Flatters, Ed Gray, Clint Janes, Jim Ogle, Wes Young  
20 Yr. Ellen Ary, Steve Grayson, Martin Lopez, George Martin, Alison Patrick, Melcolm Peralta, Peggy Perley, Craig Walker

## REMINDER:

NM/PRA Summer Picnic will be held at Sedano Park from 10:00 A.M. to 4.00 P.M. on June 17, 2000.