



## President's Message

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### Dear Friends and Fellow Planetarians

This is my last President's Message prior to our IPS 2012 conference in Baton Rouge. As I write, it is exactly three months until our opening reception on Sunday, July 22.

This conference will be the culmination of over four years of planning and preparation. The initial 2012 conference proposals were brought to the IPS Council and the general membership at the IPS 2008 Chicago conference. Council members at the 2009 Toulouse Council meeting choose Baton Rouge after input from members of each regional affiliate. An incredible amount of planning and preparation has taken place in the ensuing three years.

Conference host Jon Elvert and his team have set the stage for a rich and fulfilling conference. Now the quality of our conference experience depends on each one of us. We will have many exciting speakers, paper sessions, workshops and vendor presentations.

### Behind the scenes is important

Some of the most important activity that goes on at each conference is not scheduled, however. It is the networking and discussions that take place between and after the organized events. There will be many opportunities and venues where that networking can take place. Let's all resolve to make this the best IPS conference ever!

There were almost 400 people registered for the conference as of late April. I am especially pleased that we have people registered from 34 different countries, including, among others, Oman, Algeria, Pakistan, Ukraine, Denmark, Malaysia and Ghana. We even have a registrant from Guam! There is a growing sense of anticipation in our worldwide community.

Visit the conference social media sites—Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+—to witness some of that excitement. Links to these sites can be found on at the top of the various sections of the conference website. Members who may not be able to attend the conference personally will still be able to have a virtual presence at the opening ceremony, the business meeting and the paper sessions. Keep your eye on the conference website for

more details on how to participate virtually.

As I mentioned in my last column, this is the 40th anniversary of the first conference, which was held in San Francisco in 1972. The planetarium world has changed greatly since that time, but one thing that has not changed is the opportunity that we have to guide our visitors to a better understanding of the universe.

Although many of us have tools that we could have hardly dreamed of 40 years ago, there is one thing that has not changed: the importance of using whatever tools we have to tell our engaging stories of science and the Universe. Storytelling is such a vital part of what we do.

Attendees at the 2010 SEPA meeting at the Bays Mountain Planetarium were reminded of that during a series of workshops on storytelling. It behooves all of us to hone our storytelling skills. I encourage other regional affiliates to hold similar workshops during their meetings.

There are also many storytelling resources available online. An Internet search containing the terms "using stories to teach astronomy" will list many relevant links. One of the best ones that I found, from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, is titled "ASP: The Story of Astronomy." Authors Mindy Kalchman and Lorne Brown describe how to use storytelling as a part of astronomy lessons. Here is a short quote from their article:

"Because of this incredibly rich story history that permeates the science of astronomy, it seems only logical that learning about the fundamental principles and people involved in it, be accomplished through the telling and retelling of stories."

### The importance of passion

I hope that all of you had a chance to read Phil Groce's Guest Editorial in the last issue of the Planetarian and that you were as inspired by it as I was. If you haven't read it, be sure to do so. It is well worth rereading. Phil made so many relevant points, but I was especially struck by what he wrote about the role of the planetarium.

"In the fullness of time, I realized that the role of the planetarium was to celebrate the

universe with as much passion and love of knowledge as possible and to help our visitors interpret what they see in the sky."

One way to maintain the passion and enthusiasm that Phil mentions is to look at the sky ourselves, to renew our own personal connection with the universe. If we aren't inspired, it's hard to inspire our audiences.

Our theaters are wonderful places that can show us the sky at any time of the day or night, whether it's clear or cloudy. If we have a digital projector we can take our audiences on voyages to the most distant reaches of outer and inner space, to places that we cannot travel to with our present technology.

But, no matter how fantastic our projector might be, we should always remember that it is a simulator. We need to encourage our audiences to personally observe the night sky and to have their own personal experience with the universe.

### Make it real for the public

Many of you probably operate telescopes for your audiences at certain times, especially for special events like the May solar eclipse and the June transit of Venus. Seeing the moon, a planet, or a deep sky object through a telescope is much different than looking at a picture of it or viewing it on a CCD monitor.

When I looked at Sirius twinkling in the southwest a few minutes ago, I observed real photons of light that had traveled for nearly 9 years from the star to my retina. It's hard to imagine that one of our sun's closest neighbors is so close, and yet so far away.

One of my favorite things to do on a warm summer evening is to sit on my front step, look at nearby stars and think back in my life and recall what I was doing when the light left from stars of varying distances.

Of course, the light from the majority of the stars that we can see at night left before you or I were born. When we look at the light from the moon, a planet, a star or galaxy it's as if we have a connection with that object in a deeply profound sense.

Another way to maintain our passion is to continue to continue our professional development, to never stop learning and growing. Over the years I have had times when I felt stuck in a rut and my passion was fading. Personally, I have found conferences, star parties and working with colleagues in other parts of the world useful in rejuvenating my passion.

Perhaps you can take a class, go on sabbatical or volunteer your services to help in some way in another planetarium in your home country or another part of the world. I know that many of you are doing such activities. Here are two examples that I have recently heard of.

Planetarian Kyle Doane, who has won  
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many hats in the time that I have known him, recently spent a month volunteering at the Ghana Planetarium. I'm sure that either he or Jacob and Jane Ashong will be happy to tell you more about that experience if you visit with them at the IPS conference.

Jacob and Jane are always looking for volunteers to come help them spread the "gospel of astronomy" in their friendly nation.

Another outreach example is the "Reach for the Stars-Afghanistan" project that Christopher Phillips (Imiloa Planetarium) is doing in conjunction with Astronomers Without Borders and the Afghanistan Astronomy Association. They plan to "provide science education to Afghan children and underserved ethnic groups by sharing the wonder and beauty of the universe." Additional information on the project and fund raising efforts are at [www.indiegogo.com/reachforthestars](http://www.indiegogo.com/reachforthestars).

I look forward to visiting with some of you personally in Baton Rouge, and I wish all of you a profitable winter/summer, depending upon your hemisphere. ☆