

# Friends Of The Austin Planetarium

Volume 3, Issue 1

[www.AustinPlanetarium.org](http://www.AustinPlanetarium.org)

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## Did You Know?

Austin is the largest city in the U.S. that does **not** have a planetarium.

## Survey Sample

"Our TAKS scores are just an indicator of what we have known all along. You have to provide meaningful, relevant experiences for students to develop the deep understanding needed to retain information from year to year. We do not have enough resources to do that!" --*Round Rock Science Teacher*

## Stay Up to Date!

Get the latest update on the Friends of the Austin Planetarium by making frequent stops at the FOTAP website. Soon to come will be a range of quotes, like the one above, from the survey completed by the McCombs School of Business students. See what teachers are saying about a future planetarium.

## Over 10,000!

FOTAP's website has now gone over the magical number of 10,000 visitors! This has all transpired in less than two years, and over half of these hits occurred in the last six months. Pass the word about the website to friends, colleagues and relatives and we'll be over the 25,000 mark by the end of this year! Thanks to all for your interest and support!

## Board of Directors

- Anne Adkins
- Larry Forrest
- Sharleen Forrest
- Torvald Hessel

## The Data Is In!

This fall, as part of a marketing class project with Dr. Eugene Sepulveda at the University of Texas, The Friends of the Austin Planetarium worked with four outstanding students to evaluate the educational impact of a planetarium and science museum complex here in Austin. Courtney Rountree, Brenton Burke, Laura Vincent, and Lisa Vincent worked with FOTAP Director Ron Johns and FOTAP Advisor Roger Williams to research the published literature to see what impact planetaria and other science-related facilities have had on student achievement. They also conducted a survey of local public school teachers on the need for such facilities.



McCombs School of Business students, from left to right, Brenton Burke, Courtney Rountree, Lisa Vincent, and Laura Vincent.

Studies have shown that space science and astronomy concepts learned in planetaria and science museums remain with a student longer than strict classroom education. Several studies in the 1990's documented that 80% of graduating college students were able to recall specifics of trips they had made to such places in first, second, or third grade! Moreover, the trips themselves have lasting educational value. A study of programs offered at the Houston Museum of Natural Science for Houston ISD documented that, in conjunction with a hands-on science lab, a planetarium program increased student understanding of related topics by 24% and resulted in an 11% increase in the students' interest in science as a career. By using hands-on learning, interactive exhibits, and visual spatial teaching, a planetarium is able to engage students in ways that traditional classroom teaching cannot. They generate an excitement in learning and a wonder in science and space that promotes the development of future scientists.

The second part of the project involved a teacher survey conducted amongst elementary and middle school educators in Austin, Round Rock, Leander, and Hays ISD's. The questions related to whether teachers felt they had access to appropriate resources and advice concerning science, space science, and astronomy-related subjects. Of

- Ron Johns
- Steven Rung

### Advisory Panel

- Matthew Michael Agee
- Christopher Lines
- Barbara ten Brink
- Joyce Sampson
- Roger Williams

the 218 educators surveyed, over 70% surveyed believe a planetarium would help them perform their science teaching responsibilities better or easier, and 71% said they would definitely incorporate a visit to a planetarium as part of their curriculum if they could (while another 19% said they probably would).

It is apparent that students and teachers would benefit from having a planetarium in the Austin area, and that many teachers would take their students there as part of their curriculum. The availability of hands-on experiments and access to expert advice would allow teachers to perform their jobs more effectively and should significantly improve student achievement.

### Science Gets New Focus

Science will soon gain a higher prominence in Texas schools. In 2007-2008, the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* will require that schools submit progress reports for students on state science tests.

In a recent study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Texas scored an "F", one of the 15 states to do so. As a result of the increased stakes, there is an urgency to begin steps to address inadequacies in this area.

It is our belief that a planetarium is key to aiding Austin-community teachers with science-related topics to enhance their own classroom learning. The proposed Austin planetarium will offer programs in astronomy, of course, but also in other areas of the space sciences and scientific exploration. Additionally, classroom laboratories within the planetarium will offer students experiential, hands-on programs in other areas of the sciences.

As Texas raises the bar for passing the TEKS and TAKS test, student performance will be critical. In the high school level, we currently estimate that at least 67 to 100% of the TEKS related to physics, chemistry, and astronomy could be addressed and supported by planetarium visits. Furthermore, at elementary and middle school levels, over 50% of science TEKS and over 40% of science TAKS could be effectively addressed.

There is no doubt that many actions need to transpire to bring our science education in Texas up to par. The establishment of a planetarium in Austin would be a giant step in the right direction.

Next month's AstroNews takes a look at the all-important issue of how much each of us weigh - not just here on Earth, but on other planets! Will you weigh more, or less, on Mars? Will your weight top out at a ton on Jupiter? Just pop your Earth weight into our little calculator and pick one of the offered destinations to get an instant answer to these queries.

In March, we take a look at the Earth's proximity to the Sun. Do you think we're closer to the Sun in the wintertime - when it's cold

included discounts and special offers from 80-plus stores; door prizes; "tastings" by Auntie Anne's, Outback Steakhouse, Chili's, Bennigan's, and Godiva; a cash bar; and entertainment by a number of musical groups including Strings Attached with Trish Murphy. Of course, Santa was there for the tots as well! And, just to top off the evening, one of the tickets sold by the Friends of the Austin Planetarium won one of the grand prizes - a sterling silver and diamond bracelet from Zales Jewelers.

If you know of other such events that can help FOTAP gain further exposure in the community and raise money to get us closer to our goal of building a planetarium in Austin, please contact us at [www.AustinPlanetarium.org](http://www.AustinPlanetarium.org) website.

### Breakfast Meeting with Rotary Club

Board member Torvald Hessel met on November 18, 2005 with the

outdoors - or do you think we're further away? Log on and find out! The answer might surprise you!

### **Gift Ideas!**

Don't forget to check out the fabulous merchandise on our [website](#) next time you need a birthday gift for family or friends. We offer t-shirts, bumper stickers, license plate frames, mousepads, and mugs. Every purchase helps bring us closer to our goal.

### **The Poet's Corner**

"I stood beside a hill  
Smooth with new-laid snow,  
A single star looked out  
From the cold evening glow.  
There was no other creature  
That saw what I could see  
I stood and watched the evening  
star  
As long as it watched me."  
- Sara Teasdale

### **Questions & Comments:**

[info@austinplanetarium.org](mailto:info@austinplanetarium.org)

Northwest Austin Rotary Club to provide a presentation on the business plan for the Friends of the Austin Planetarium. The meeting was held at the Balcones Country Club and had about 60 people in attendance. Mr. Hessel spoke for approximately 30 minutes to the group.

We welcome suggestions on other groups in the Austin area that might be interested in learning more about our project. We offer two types of presentation - one more specific to a business audience which outlines the Austin Planetarium business model, and a second program aimed more at a lay audience which orients the listeners to planetaria in general, a history of planetaria through the years, and what we hope to accomplish in Austin. Please contact us at [www.AustinPlanetarium.org](http://www.AustinPlanetarium.org) website to advise us of possibilities.

### **\$1.2M to Midland Planetarium!**

The Museum of the Southwest's Blakemore Planetarium in Midland recently announced that it was awarded \$1.2 million from the Texas State Legislature to renovate and update the planetarium and construct a new science education wing. The planetarium's 35-year-old projector will be replaced, new stadium seating will be installed, and the 40-foot dome will be given a 20-degree tilt. The planetarium committee has been working on this project for two years. Congratulations to the Blakemore on this award!

### **Fall Direct Mail Campaign a Success!**

In early November, the Friends of the Austin Planetarium held its annual fall mailing to update past supporters and other potential donors in the community on the status of getting a planetarium built in Austin. This provided an opportunity to share our new brochure with friends and to detail several of our major accomplishments for 2005. We had a terrific response to this effort and want to take this opportunity to once again say thanks to all of our supporters. You've donated through United Way, PayPal, monthly pledges, annual memberships, generous checks, and your Randall's Remarkable card!