

## ASKC Makes Historic Purchase of Dark Sky Site

by Tim Kristl

The Astronomical Society of Kansas City made a historic purchase today, February 3, 2005 of a 40 acre site located in an area with very dark skies. The site and the decision to purchase had its beginnings in early November of 2002, when the Society conducted a day long strategic planning session. That session identified a dark sky site as a major need and desire for those members who wished to do visual observing. While the Powell Observatory had been constructed on a fairly dark sky site about 20 years ago, new home construction had occurred closer and closer, making the site less desirable for serious visual observing. While Powell Observatory could still serve for many more years as a site for public education and even astro imaging, it was no longer optimal for visual observing by members searching for "faint fuzzies."

Shortly thereafter, ASKC President David Young appointed a committee to design a fundraising program to attempt to find funding for the purchase of the dark sky site. The committee named itself, Project C.O.R.E., for Center for Observation, Research and Education. At the previous strategic planning session, the members had listed the primary activities of the ASKC as observation, research and education of the public, so the committee members felt it only appropriate to name the committee for those objectives.

The Project CORE committee was composed of Tim Kristl, Chair and members Bill Boyle, Larry Goode, Carroll Iorg, Kathy Machin and Randy Thompson. The committee then embarked on designing a fundraising case statement brochure, detailing the history of the ASKC, the principal functions and activities of the Society and the critical need for the proposed dark sky site. In April of 2003, the board approved the proposed program and in May of 2003 the campaign was initiated.

The campaign consisted of three levels of participation by ASKC members:

- Supernova Level - consisting of \$125.00 per quarter for 3 years for a total contribution of \$1,500.00
- Star Level - consisting of \$62.50 per quarter for 3 years for a total contribution of \$750.00
- Meteor Level - consisting of \$25.00 per quarter for 3 years for a total contribution of \$300.00
- Any other contribution would be very appreciated
- Each contributor would receive a commemorative lapel pin
- All donations would be tax deductible

The ASKC members immediately responded to the call for assistance. While the Project CORE plan envisioned a three year or longer program, in only fifteen months ASKC had \$15,000 in cash in the bank and pledges for another \$17,000. Contributors numbered about 40 different member families representing about sixty

individual members of the ASKC! </p>

In the summer of 2004, with enough funds to make a purchase offer serious, a search was then begun for the desired dark sky location. Numerous sites were considered and rejected on both the Kansas and Missouri sides. Then, in late summer, 2004, one site was considered very seriously. However, after due diligence, it also was rejected. The search was begun anew. Luckily, within a few more months, a new site was located by Larry Goode, who had driven thousands of miles looking at possible locations. During a report about the possible new site to the ASKC board, past president Scott Kranz suggested that maybe the owner might allow ASKC to “test-drive” the site for a few months. During the contract negotiations, that thought was broached and accepted by the farmer-owner. So ASKC members “rented” the site for three months and were able to conduct star site “test-drives” at the dark sky location. Three different star parties were scheduled. The first two resulted in 33 and 34 members participating! And almost as importantly, almost sixty different members attended and about one-third were first time attenders of a star party at all. Even the owner, Junior Wood attended and brought his children and grandchildren. The sky was dark and the stars sparkled their shining approval of the location.

With the experience of the successful star parties in hand, the Board directed that the proposed site be placed in front of the ASKC members for a vote at the January, 2005 general meeting. For a decision as important as this, it was felt that the membership as a whole needed to approve the purchase. Unless the membership felt this was a good decision, it would not be successful. A program at the November, 2004 general membership meeting was dedicated to discuss the proposal and list the pros and cons. Several articles featured the momentous upcoming decision in the Cosmic Messenger. The decision was truly Cosmic in importance! Under the ASKC bylaws, the vote was to be held by written ballot with ballots capable of being mailed in by all members, even those who were not able to attend the general meeting.

As the date of the meeting approached, the Project CORE committee sweated out the decision, wondering whether they had provided the right information to the members and whether the members would consider the work of the Committee over the past 20 months sufficient to approve the purchase. While significant funds had been raised, not all the required funds were in the bank. What should be done with the funds if the purchase was not approved. Perhaps the members would feel that more work and fund raising was needed before embarking on such an important decision. The committee considered developing a survey to ask the members what more they wanted, in the event the purchase was not approved.

At long last, the decision day arrived, the all important vote tabulated and the result was a mandate! The members overwhelmingly approved the proposed purchase by a vote of 101 to 5! The purchase would be made! The meeting tone was estatic. At the meeting, several members who had not previously contributed provided new donations. Several more arrived in the mail. The Project CORE fund now had \$24,000 in cash and an additional \$12,000 in pledges. The members were responding not only

with their vote but also with contributions.

On February 3, 2005, ASKC President Joe Wright and Project CORE Chair Tim Kristl traveled to Butler, Missouri to close the purchase. Project Core Committee member Kathy Machin had obtained a book on lunar observing written by an author named Wood to give as a commemorative gift to the sellers, Junior and Doris Wood. Each of the Project CORE committee members signed it with a note to Junior and Doris, who were very touched by the gift.

**AND THE ASKC HAD OBTAINED OWNERSHIP OF THEIR VERY OWN DARK SKY SITE!!!**