

# NOVA

NEWSLETTER OF THE VANCOUVER CENTRE RASC | VOLUME 2011 ISSUE 3 | MAY/JUNE 2011

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## Looking Ahead

Remember, you are always welcome to attend meetings of Council, held on the first Thursday of every month at 7:30pm in the Ray Whittick Lounge.

**May 12:** David Helfand, president of Quest University in Squamish: "How Superman Sees the Stars."

**Jun. 9:** Jim Zibin, Postdoctoral Fellow at UBC: "Dark Energy or Something Even Crazier?"

## Next Issue Deadline

Material for the July Nova should be submitted by Monday, Jul. 4, 2011. Please send submissions to:

[novaeditor.rascvancouver@gmail.com](mailto:novaeditor.rascvancouver@gmail.com)

Title image: Jason Rickerby

## 2011 International Astronomy Day

by Suzanna Nagy

Despite an ominous weather forecast, Astronomy Day was celebrated at Aldergrove Lake Park held jointly with Metro Parks who provided the venue and supplies (tents, tables, etc.).

Jim Bernath, with his science display, and Ted Stroman, with his Apollo missions display, were a big hit as always. I can't remember an Astronomy Day where Jim and Ted have not participated and it is



Numerous tents covered a multitude of displays and participants including the National Research Council, Space Launch Canada, Fraser Valley Astronomers Society, Canadian Telescope, and the SFU Astronomy Club.

always a pleasure to see the children enjoying their displays and hands-on activities.

Children were making solar system mobiles, families were participating in a solar system walk,

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**Remembering Derek Miller (see page 2)**

Derek Miller, son of Hilkka and Juergen Karl Miller, died in the evening of May 3, 2011, after battling metastatic colon cancer for more than four years.

On Sunday, May 15 at the Arts Club on Granville Island, there will be a ceremony, service, and celebration for Derek. Doors open at 1:00 and it starts at 2:00pm.

Derek was the author of a remarkable blog that drew many

followers from around the world for more than 10 years, and which had 8 million hits in response to his posthumous "Last Post." An article in The Canadian Press, available on-line, notes that Derek's blog will be maintained as an archive at [www.penmachine.com](http://www.penmachine.com) and will also have an option for readers to donate to a trust fund to support Miller's 11-year-old and 13-year-old daughters.

Derek's father, Karl, has been a member of the RASC Vancouver Centre since 1977, has served as our President, and only recently stepped down from a very active role as a Trustee. Karl has written a very moving tribute to his son on his own blog at [penmachinedad.blogspot.com](http://penmachinedad.blogspot.com).

The thoughts of the members of RASC Vancouver will surely be with Karl and his family. ✨

## Urban Star Party 2011

by Wayne Lyons

Many thanks to all those who attended the first Urban Star Party held at Aldergrove Lake Regional Park on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. In spite of the worst weather in an already dismal spring, close to fifty volunteers from RASC Vancouver Centre, the SFU Undergraduate Astronomy Club and the Fraser Valley Astronomers Society were on hand and ready to help out with daytime presentations and activities.

Partial funding for this event came from a raffle held to support Vancouver Centre's efforts to promote astronomy in the Lower Mainland. The following is a list of this year's prizes and winners:

**1st Prize:** 8" SkyWatcher Dobson Telescope – Mikayla Browett, Maple Ridge.

**2nd Prize:** NRC Astronomy survival pack-1 – Ray Swartzberg, Coquitlam.

- Includes everything in pack 2 & pack 3 plus:
- 1 Nightwatch by T. Dickinson

**3rd Prize:** Acuter 8x42 Binoculars – Bob Heslop, Burnaby.

**4th Prize:** NRC Astronomy survival pack 2 – Erin Lyons, Maple Ridge

- Includes everything in pack 3 plus:
- 1 CFHT Hawaiian starlight video
- 1 Astronaut ice cream
- 1 Muin First nations astronomy book for children
- 1 Sun print activity kit

**5th Prize:** Celestron Outland-X 10x42 Binoculars – Harry Klassen, Surrey

**6th Prize:** NRC Astronomy survival pack-3 – Michael Reding, Surrey

- 1 DVD
- 1 Galileoscope
- 1 Poster
- Several packages of UV Beads, bookmarks, magnets and postcards

First, third and fifth prizes were provided by RASC Vancouver Centre and Vancouver Telescope Centre. The second, fourth and sixth place prizes were courtesy of the National Research Council

(NRC).

The following door prizes were also presented throughout the day by a generous donation from Babak Sedehi and Canadian Telescopes:

1. Canadian Telescopes 8x60 waterproof binoculars
2. Set of Canadian Telescopes 2.5, 5 and 9mm 58-degree 1.25" planetary eyepiece set
3. Canadian Telescopes CT3000 - 3 megapixel planetary colour imager

Besides the many volunteers that turned out to make this event a success, special thanks must go to all the organizers: Suzanna Nagy from RASC Vancouver Centre, Lori Bartley from Metro Parks, Eric Chisholm from the NRC and Paul Greenhalgh with the Fraser Valley Astronomers Society.

This event was made possible through generous contributions made by RASC Vancouver Centre, Metro Parks, Canadian Telescopes, NRC and Vancouver Telescope Centre. ✨

## President's Message

I've been a member of RASC Vancouver for only four years, and look what has happened to me!

Clarification: I'm thrilled to be serving as Vancouver Centre President! And in the past four years, I've become so deeply submerged in astronomy, for public outreach at RASC Vancouver and at SFU, and to scratch my personal itch for astronomical imaging, that my family's lifestyle has been forever changed (more on the latter in a two part story in NOVA; Part 1 was in the last edition, and Part 2 will appear in the next).

So after only four years at RASC Vancouver, I have many members still to meet, and many others to get to know still better. Perhaps more surprising is the number of activities put on by our society that I have yet to experience, despite my deep submersion in astronomy, both personally and as an educator, over the last four years. I am continually impressed and inspired anew by the passionate commitment to public service of so many members of Vancouver Centre, and by the wide range of activities for the public as well as our fellow members that is powered by this commitment.

Since the last regular edition of NOVA, I've had the particular pleasure of diving deep into two of RASC Vancouver's signature annual events: "Night Quest," put on by Metro Parks at Pacific Spirit Regional Park on West 16<sup>th</sup>, to which we have been invited to participate for many years, and which this year

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## 2011 Vancouver Centre Officers

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## About RASC

The Vancouver Centre, RASC meets at 7:30 PM in the auditorium of the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre at 1100 Chestnut St., Vancouver, on the second Thursday of every month. Guests are always welcome. In addition, the Centre has an observing site where star parties are regularly scheduled.

Membership is currently \$73.00 per year (\$41.00 for persons under 21 years of age) and can be obtained by writing to the Treasurer at the address on page 5. Annual membership includes the invaluable Observer's Handbook, six issues of the RASC Journal, and, of course, access to all of the club events and projects.

For more information regarding the Centre and its activities, please contact our P.R. Director.

NOVA, the newsletter of the Vancouver Centre, RASC, is published on odd numbered months. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Vancouver Centre.

Material on any aspect of astronomy should be e-mailed to the editor or mailed to the address on page 5.

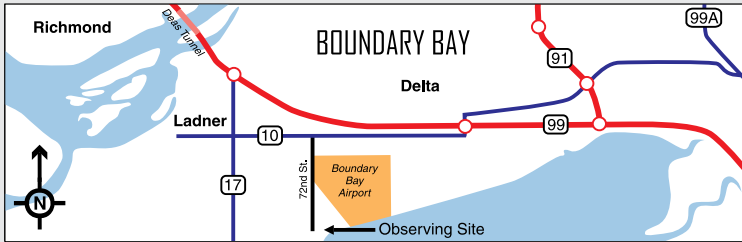
## Advertising

Nova encourages free use of its classified ads for members with items for sale or swap. Notify the editor if you wish your ad to run in more than one issue.

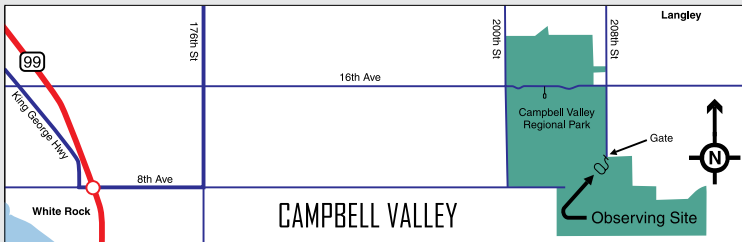
## Commerical Rates

1/4 Page: \$15.00 per issue  
1/2 Page: \$25.00 per issue  
Full Page: \$40.00 per issue  
Rates are for electronic or camera-ready files. Payment, by cheque, must accompany ad material. Make cheque payable to:  
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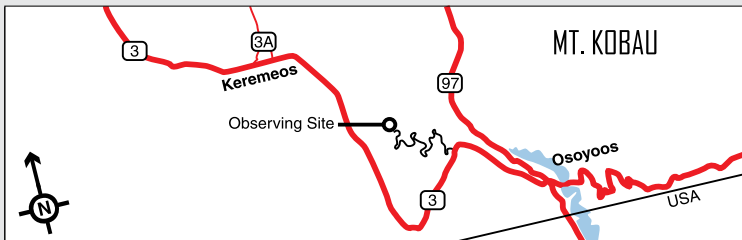
# OBSERVING SITES



Site of the regular Saturday night star party. On the dike at the foot of 72nd St.



Our alternate observing site. Contact Bruce MacDonald (604-882-3820) to see if this site is in use.



Site of the annual Mt. Kobau Star Party organized by the Mount Kobau Astronomical Society

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took place on Saturday March 19; and Astronomy Day, which we held this year at Aldergrove Lake Regional Park on Saturday May 8, at the invitation of Metro Parks, in association with their annual “Urban Star Quest.”

(My first participation in RASC Vancouver’s Astronomy Day was last year, when it was held at SFU in September, though that time out I primarily wore my “SFU astronomy outreach” hat. SFU put on a huge science open house to promote its

project to build an observatory and science outreach centre, and RASC Vancouver’s Astronomy Day generated the initial impetus for the event. By the way, did you know that RASC Vancouver has provided significant support for this project in particular, and SFU astronomy outreach in general, including a generous matching donation last year on behalf of membership to the observatory’s capital construction fund, and a major commitment of volunteer time to SFU’s outreach activities? I can tell you that this

support is well recognized at SFU!)

Metro Parks’ “Night Quest” had a huge turnout again this year, this time in excess of 1600 people! We estimate about half that number paid a visit to the RASC Vancouver area, which was located at a very prominent location designated especially for us by Metro Parks. Our many guests enjoyed telescopic views of the night sky, thanks to council members Suzanna Nagy, Harvey Dueck, and Doug Montgomery, and took home additional insights into

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the cosmos from conversations with Bill Burnyeat and yours truly, along with handouts including some 200 RASC star wheels and information on Vancouver Centre. The event was also notable for the fact that by about Noon that day, we had “officially” given up on bringing telescopes, with the forecast from Environment Canada calling for late afternoon thunderstorms and heavy rain into the evening! Nonetheless, our guests were treated to some pretty decent skies, and RASC Vancouver was there with telescopes!

How is it that a bad forecast so rarely turns out to be wrong, while good forecasts frequently (usually?) turn bad?

I took a little time off from our station, during a lull between surges of guests, for my first-ever walk of the “Night Quest” trail. There were lanterns along the path; a series of inspiring and thought-provoking quotes from naturalists, scientists, and other writers, posted on trees all along the way; and many volunteers in costume staffing hands-on displays about nocturnal wildlife at many stations on the trail. RASC Vancouver’s site was at an elevated clearing close to the trailhead, and just down the slope from us stood a big tent where grade-school age volunteers served up low-cost treats. All of this came together to create a magical and moving experience. My only regret was that I did not discover “Night Quest” when my son Alexandre was a tot, as it is an experience that must surely leave a young visitor (not to mention

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## LIBRARY

The centre has a large library of books, magazines and old NOVA’s for your enjoyment at the GMSO. Please take advantage of this club service and visit often to check out the new purchases. Suggestions for future library acquisitions are appreciated.

## RASC-VC on the Internet

<http://rasc-vancouver.com> or  
<http://www.rasc.ca/vancouver>

Details of upcoming meetings and events can be found at our Meetup group at:

<http://astronomy.meetup.com/131/>

## H.R. MACMILLAN SPACE CENTRE

The H.R. MacMillan Space Centre Society is a non-profit organization operating the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre and the Gordon M. Southam Observatory. Annual membership (\$30 individual; \$80 family) includes newsletter, discounts on Space Camps, birthday parties, lectures, Museum of Vancouver admission, plus free admission to the Space Centre. Admission includes: multi-media Planetarium productions, interactive demonstrations and hands-on exhibits. For membership, contact Gayle Seaman 604-738-7827 (ext 221) or [star@spacecentre.ca](mailto:star@spacecentre.ca)

<http://www.spacecentre.ca>

## MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES!

New members, did you know? The Vancouver Centre has 8 telescopes available for loan free of charge! We have telescopes ranging from 60mm to 10” diameter. For more information see the Director of Telescopes in the meeting room of the GMSO after the members meeting. All telescopes are to be picked up and returned at the GMSO. The loaner period is for one month, to be returned after the next meeting. Telescopes are not allowed to circulate outside of these meetings. You can now reserve two different telescopes per year and use what is left at the end of the meeting anytime.

Your greatest opportunity as a member of the RASC is to take advantage of the company of other enthusiasts to increase your knowledge, enjoyment and skill in astronomy.

The best thing you can do to gain the most from your membership is to get active! Take in the club meetings; engage other members with questions; come out to observing sessions (also known as “star parties”), and, by all means, volunteer to take part in our many public events.

Observing takes place at Boundary Bay on the dike at the south end of 72nd St. in Delta (see map on p. 4). We are there most clear Friday/Saturday nights. Contact Jason Rickerby at 604-502-8158.

**RASC  
1100 Chestnut Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6J 3J9  
604-738-2855**

## July

July 30 - Aug. 7 – Mt. Kobau  
Star Party

## August

Aug. 27 - Sept. 3 – Merritt Star  
Quest

## December

8 – AGM

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and everyone enjoyed the lectures that went non-stop throughout the afternoon.

Although attendance was down due to the weather, many positive comments were received. Those that made the journey out to Aldergrove

certainly were glad they made the effort.

A special thanks has to go to all the volunteers and speakers as well as to Council. Everyone worked together and it was a sight to see almost 50 volunteers working towards ensuring all attendees

enjoyed themselves.

Working in conjunction with Metro Parks has also been a great success and Council intends to continue with more ventures together. ✨



Clockwise from upper left: Wayne Lyons selling raffle tickets; Jim Bernath and Alan Jones demonstrate science to young minds; Gordon Farrell surrounded by the Gas Giants; Steve Coleopy (left) and another volunteer test the knowledge of inquisitive minds.

Volunteers:

Adrian Matangi  
Barry Pointon  
Bob Parry  
Bob Smart  
Clive Williams  
Florence Flynn  
Gerald Carter  
Harry Klassen  
Huseni Mantri  
James Ronback  
Janeen Williams  
Jason Rickerby  
Johannes Weinmar  
John Neufeld  
Katherine Go  
Mark Thane  
Nolan Smith  
Robert Quon  
Rohit Grover  
Ron Jerome  
Samson David  
Scott McGillivray  
Sinead O'Donnell  
Tara Weinmar  
Terry McComas  
Thomas Broome  
Zainab Maintri



Raffle prize winners: Mikayla Browett (1st); Bob Heslop (3rd); Erin Lyons, accepted by her grandfather, Wayne (4th); Harry Klassen (5th); Michael Reding (6th). Second prize winner Ray Swartzberg not pictured.

Below: Encouraging young minds at the NRC tent; Fun with crafts.



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their familial chaperons!) with an enduring sense of a profound connection to the natural world.

Incidentally, this was the first Vancouver Centre public event where our volunteers wore our new “RASC Volunteer” red bibs. These eye-catching pullovers can be worn even over bulky winter coats and jackets, and are one of the fruits of having Suzanna Nagy as Events Coordinator; among many other initiatives, Suzanna has been busy re-imagining and remaking our public display materials. The red bibs certainly had the desired effect on this occasion, most tellingly demonstrated as I walked along the trail, when I overheard comments from numerous passersby who noticed my bib, despite the darkness of the trail: “Oh, there goes an Astronomy volunteer”—I kid you not!

RASC Vancouver’s most ambitious public outreach event of the year is Astronomy Day, and this year a remarkably high number of volunteers came forward to deliver an outstanding slate of activities. Not including Council members who turned out in force, 26 RASCals contributed their time, either in the preparations leading to the event or on event day itself, with many working both ends of this undertaking. Our masterful Events Coordinator, Suzanna Nagy, orchestrated the whole effort with skill and poise! If you see Suzanna at any of our meetings or events, please give her kudos, not just in connection with Astronomy Day, but also for the many events that

she coordinates on behalf of RASC Vancouver throughout the year.

Better yet, why not contact Suzanna and volunteer your time, if you haven’t done so already? This can be for any degree of commitment that works for you, from casual to continuing! After all, this is what we are all about. Did you get into astronomy thanks to someone who satisfied your curiosity about some topic in space science, or who introduced you to observing the night sky? If so, then you have a special reason to volunteer your time, either behind the scenes or out in front. No matter how you got into astronomy, email Suzanna at events.rascvancouver@gmail.com, so you can give back to the community at large!

So about Astronomy Day... What the weather gives to astronomers on one evening (in this illustration, consider our “Night Quest” evening in March), the weather seems to take back in spades on another. Hence it seemed almost preordained that the skies would open up, as they did, with a torrential downpour the morning of Astronomy Day. This included hail in some regions of greater Vancouver, and the rain did not let up until after our Noon start time.

Needless to say, plans had to be adjusted accordingly. The original program was to feature an all-night star party, thanks to our Metro Parks hosts, which was scrubbed the day before based on the dismal forecast. Happily, our Noon-6PM slate of activities went ahead without a hitch, thanks to a large collection of ginormous tents, a multitude of

electrical power connections, and bathroom facilities, all provided by Metro Parks. Did I mention that Metro Parks underwrote and managed the entire logistical effort for Astronomy Day, with a bargain entrance fee of just \$2?! Our volunteers had only to set up some tables and chairs, along with a couple of our own tents, to then get busy engaging the public with our many displays and activities.

I imagine that at this point one might like to know the attendance. At last year’s Astronomy Day, we had over 1,000 guests ☺, and this year... about 140 ☺. But we had a lot of very positive feedback from those that came despite the morning downpour, and this kept our volunteers and participating groups in very good spirits. And lesson learned: next year, as with last year, we will choose a venue with a fully enclosed interior space in case of rain.

I’m going to take a stab at describing a few of the many highlights of our Astronomy Day program (and you can find more information in Suzanna Nagy’s article elsewhere in this edition of NOVA). But first I want to thank our sponsors, and first and foremost that means the Metro Parks team led by Parks Interpretation Specialist Lori Bartley. Lori and her crew went above and beyond the call of duty to run a professional logistical operation that made all the difference. So on behalf of RASC Vancouver, I want to shout out a ginormous “Thank You” to our friends from Metro Parks.

A set of ginormous “Thank You”-s goes out to our sponsors: the NRC

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Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics, Vancouver Telescope, and Canadian Telescopes. Their generosity showed in our large collection of first-rate raffle and door prizes. See RASC Vancouver Treasurer Wayne Lyons' article elsewhere in this NOVA for the full set of prizes and the lucky winners.

I also want to single out Sharon Guilford for special mention. Sharon's kids and their Grade 2/3 elementary school class participated in an SFU astronomy workshop way back in February of 2009. Her family's continuing involvement in SFU's outreach program, "Starry Nights @ SFU," eventually led them to attend one of Vancouver Centre's first "What's Up?" functions at the Space Centre in March. "What's Up?" is a new series that is designed especially for newcomers to astronomy, particularly young ones, and which precedes our regular monthly lectures. Sharon was moved to donate a portion of the Bob Thirsk memorabilia in her possession to RASC Vancouver, including pins from an ISS flight, and autographed pictures of the man himself, the Canadian astronaut who has logged the most hours in space, and who has also spent the longest time in space on a single mission. Sharon knows Thirsk from when her family lived outside Houston. In 2009, Sharon got Thirsk to connect from the ISS via video with the elementary school class attended by her kids. Hence the memorabilia. Sharon gave RASC Council complete latitude to use these items in the most effective ways we could come up with. After much

discussion, Council decided to use this treasure trove to acknowledge the work done by RASC Vancouver volunteers. At our May 12 public meeting at the Space Centre, our Events Coordinator Suzanna Nagy will present one of these items to one of our Astronomy Day volunteers, drawn at random.

Among our many presenters on Astronomy Day, Jim Bernath was on hand with his awesome collection of space rocks, which he insists that visitors inspect hands-on, as well as through his microscope, and which include a moon rock and a passel of meteorites. And then there was Jim's mind-bending dark bottomless pit in a box! Jim's display is well known to many RASCals, and has been seen by countless kids, but this was my first time through his collection and I'll be back for more! Another first for me was to participate in Ted Stroman's passionate and authoritative presentation on the Apollo missions; I came away with a renewed conviction that the best public presentations make minimal or no use of "canned goods" such as "Powerpoint", and maximal use of imaginations fired by compelling story telling using "real world" props, as Ted does with his models of Apollo-era rockets and spacecraft, including the Saturn V. Council members premiered RASC Vancouver's new set of professional-looking posters on the Sun and planets, simultaneously eye-catching and informative, thanks to the vision of Suzanna Nagy, and genuinely professional graphic design by NOVA editor Gordon Farrell, and drawing on raw material from our partners

at the NRC Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics in Victoria.

Another highlight of Astronomy Day was the "Solar System Walk" put on SFU Student Astronomy Club members Ciara Morgan-Feir, Alanna Shuh, Michelle Murvai, and Rohit Grover (who is one of RASC Vancouver's newest members). What sets this solar system model apart from many others is that an equal scale is applied to the planet sizes and their orbits. Shrink the Earth down to a peppercorn, and walk one kilometer to reach a pinhead Pluto, an honorary full-fledged planet on this occasion! Our SFU student volunteers were kept busy throughout the afternoon with a steady stream of kids of all ages, including many repeat customers ☺.

I've just scratched the surface of our program. There were kids crafts and activity tables, with Jill Breckenridge first to jump in as always at the earliest planning stages; an informative display on Light Pollution Abatement by LPA Chair Mark Eburne; a speaker series kicked off and hosted by yours truly; and impressive displays by our partners from the NRC Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics, Canadian Telescopes, the Fraser Valley Astronomers Society, and Space Launch Canada. And finally, not to forget our many top-quality raffle and door prizes.

In case the foregoing account of "Night Quest" and "Astronomy Day/Urban Star Quest" is not enough to raise your eyebrows at RASC Vancouver's major-league engagement with the public, RASCals have been busy over the past two

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months with much more!

At our March 10 public meeting, we hosted science educator and writer Sharon Proctor, who had a intriguing astronomical tale to tell from Vancouver's early history, "Grouse Mountain Observatory: an early 20th century dream." We sponsored and participated in "Galaxy Forum 2011" on April 10 at the Space Centre, an education and outreach event organized by the International Lunar Observatory Association based in Palo Alto and Hawaii. Our April 14 public meeting brought us a Members' night that included a wonderfully personal introduction to the night sky by Treasurer Wayne Lyons, part of our new "What's Up?" series. Membership Chair Gavin McLeod gave a wry scientific presentation on the Moon as part of "Vancylopedia" at the Havanna Theatre on April 23. Education Chair Bill Burnyeat presented a public lecture at the Yaletown Roundhouse on April 29, and recently surpassed a dozen special shows at the BCIT planetarium for this year alone. We've held a number of "Sidewalk Astronomy" events in recent months, including a very successful two-day program at the Valley Fair Mall in Maple Ridge on April 30 and May 1, organized by AOMO co-Chair Leigh Cummings (who has also brought astronomy to a number of Girl Guide groups in recent weeks) with major assists by Mark Eburne (who wears three hats on Council), and Immediate Past President Ron Jerome. And Yours Truly flew the RASC Vancouver flag at four daytime SFU astronomy

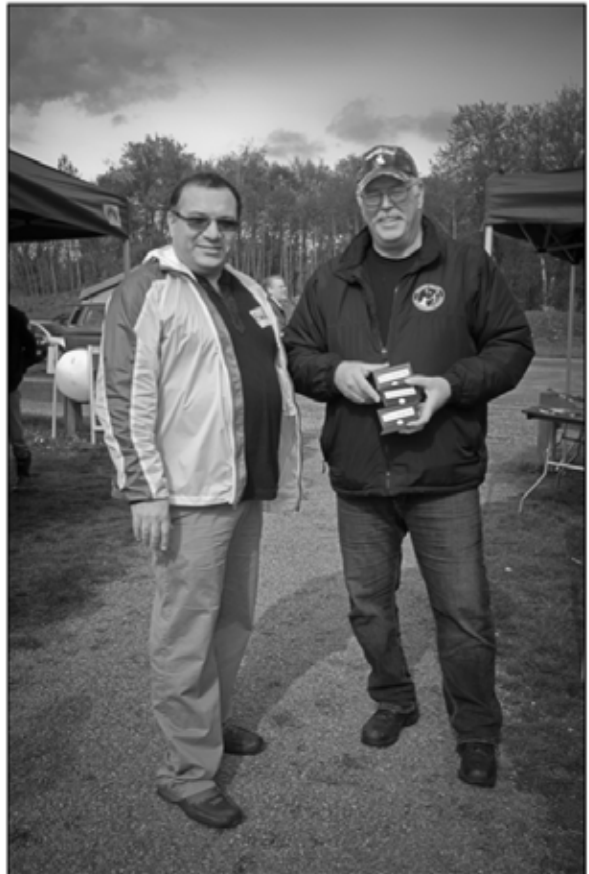
workshops between March and early May, hosting a total of about 200 grade-school age kids from six schools, with the assistance of RASCals Leigh Cummings, Ron Jerome, and Steve Megahan; and in addition, on April 27, I visited Sperling Elementary in Burnaby, to take a Grade 2 class along with their teacher and some parents on a half-kilometre "Solar System Walk" up Sperling Avenue, with the Principal's permission of course!

Finally, and by way of an impassioned summing up, I urge you to consider what RASC Vancouver already contributes to the community and volunteer your time to make it an even stronger leader in public science education and, perhaps even more importantly, in bringing the experience of science to the public. As I wrote above, this is what we are all about, and your participation can be for any degree of commitment that works

for you, from casual to continuing. So please email our Events Coordinator Suzanna Nagy at [events.rascvancouver@gmail.com](mailto:events.rascvancouver@gmail.com)!

Here's to clear skies, and more time under the stars, with membership and the public! ✨

Howard Trottier  
President, RASC-Van  
Professor of Physics, SFU





More action from the NRC tent (above); Suzanna Nagy and Alan Jones share some cover from the rain with Jim Bernath (right); Babak Sedehi with the winner of one of the door prizes donated by Canadian Telescopes (left).



Proud To Serve Vancouver's Astronomical Community



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