



GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION PRESS RELEASE

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Great Basin Observatory will launch in 2016

The Great Basin National Park Foundation has reached its goal of \$480,000 which triggers the immediate building of the first research-grade astronomical observatory to be located in a national park--- Great Basin National Park in eastern Nevada. While fundraising continues for educational programs, scientific and visitor services equipment, and operational needs, the Foundation, Park, and four university partners plan to open the Observatory in time for the Centennial of the National Park Service in August, 2016.

Longtime Foundation Board member Mike Niggli and his wife Linda announced recently that the Niggli family will give \$200,000 to purchase the 0.7 meter (28 inch) telescope which will be the Observatory centerpiece.

The Great Basin Heritage Area Partnership in Baker, Nevada, which administers the Great Basin National Heritage Area in White Pine County, Nevada and Millard County, Utah, gave the project an enormous boost with its early \$100,000 funding match.

In June, an anonymous donor challenged the Great Basin National Park Foundation by pledging \$125,000 to match all funds raised by the end of 2015. This challenge has been met and the challenger is now known to be the David Nathan Meyerson Foundation of Las Vegas.

A week ago, the Mount Cuba Astronomical Foundation, a Delaware educational foundation which supports astronomical research, announced its gift of \$100,000 for the proposed "Great Basin Observatory: Magnificent Dark Sky Astronomical Research Portal". The Principal Investigator for this grant is Dr. John Kenney of Concordia University, Irvine, California, which is one of the Observatory's university partners. The others are University of Nevada Reno, Western Nevada College in Carson City, and Southern Utah University in Cedar City. Initial research investigations at the Observatory will focus on the spectroscopy and photometry of rapidly rotating binary stars.

Nevada Energy Foundation awarded an early grant of \$50,000. The Robert S. and Dorothy J. Keyser Foundation of Reno and George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation of Salt Lake City also gave \$50,000. In September, the Community Foundation of Western Nevada in Reno awarded a Partnership Grant of \$10,000 which was quickly matched with a \$25,000 donation by the Roxie and Azad Joseph Foundation of Reno. Donations of \$20,000 were made by the Cashman Family Fund in Las Vegas and Jack Van Sickle Foundation in Reno; \$18,000 by the Willard L. Eccles Foundation of Salt Lake City; and \$5,000 each by Mt. Wheeler Power of Ely, CoBank of Colorado, The Nature Conservancy Utah Chapter and the Bretzlaff Foundation of Reno.

In addition to the Niggli Family, many more people enthusiastically support the Great Basin Observatory with funds and personal stories linking them with the star studded skies, scientific exploration, national parks, awe and mystery that have inspired their lives. For example, Elinor Tilford Charleston contributed last May when the Park dedicated the restored Tilford Cabin, built in Snake Creek in 1912 by her father John Tilford. Carolyn North Strauss donated on behalf of her late husband Dr. Herbert Strauss and herself in honor of their son Dr. Michael Strauss, Associate Chair of the Department of Astrophysics at Princeton University. Dr. Strauss endorsed the Observatory early on, writing it “will be a superb resource for astronomy education, and an opportunity to teach students about the wonders of the night sky” while also extolling its world class research value. Young students of Nevada Virtual Academy contributed art pieces to support the Observatory.

Visitors have been flocking to Great Basin National Park’s popular astronomy programs for several years. Soon they will wonder at and learn from the Great Basin Observatory’s images photographed under the Park’s dark skies from unfathomable distances and times deep in the Universe. As Park Superintendent Steve Mietz has said, “As the National Park Service approaches its 100th anniversary in 2016, there is no better time to expand our definition of parks, the resources, and opportunities for research and recreation they protect”.
