



Dedication ceremony honours comet discovery

by Tom Pierson, Maple Creek News (News)

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The Meadows Campground at Cypress Hills Park has a new signpost marking its entrance. It is a monument to the discovery of a comet at that location in 2001 by Regina resident Vance Petriew during the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party (SSSP).

The discovery led to international recognition for Petriew and Cypress Hills Park. Petriew was the first person in Saskatchewan and only the eighth Canadian ever to discover a comet. Adding to its rarity, his was only the second comet discovery ever made during a star party.

The annual Summer Star Party is hosted through the combined efforts of the Regina and Saskatoon Centres of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

On hand for the ceremony were Vance, his wife Jennifer, daughter Emily, and parents from Radisson, Saskatchewan. Assisting Vance unveil the monument was Saskatchewan Environment Minister Buckley Belanger. John Froese President of Regional Parks Committee was also on hand.

Lorne Harasen of the Regina Centre officiated at the dedication ceremony and plaque unveiling. He referred to Dr. Les Dickson as 'Mr. Saskatchewan Summer Star Party

himself". Along with his wife Ellen, Harasen said, They really unselfishly work night and day to make this thing (SSSP) a success."

Dr. Dickson replied, I'm really just a front man for a very dedicated group of people from Saskatoon and Regina and other places, who spend months and months putting this together. I want to thank them very much for doing this every year for 6 years now.

I am very much appreciative of the fact that we've been up here in this beautiful park putting on a star party and we've given Vance an opportunity to find his comet. We are very glad that Vance did it and we are all horribly jealous. And we hope that if we keep putting on these star parties maybe we will be honouring someone else in the near future," said Dr. Dickson.

Cypress Hills Park Manager Brad Mason did more than coordinate the star party and the monument dedication, he used his woodworking skills in its manufacture.

We are Honoured to have our (Environment) Minister (Buckley) Belanger here. Minister Belanger has been a strong supporter of Saskatchewan parks," said Mason. He also had kind words for the Star Party executive. They've been very good to work with and its been a very good relationship right from day one."

Harasen introduced Minister Belanger by saying, The minister has been very keen about being here for this event. He wanted to do this."

Minister Belanger welcomed the guests and stated, This is a very special day. On behalf of the government and the people of Saskatchewan, I want to recognize a special event that took place here last year. Vance Petriew, proudly, is Saskatchewan born and raised."

Leading up to Vance's discovery, Belanger said, Vance was about to score the astronomer's equivalent of a hole in one. It's a great triumph when an amateur astronomer discovers a comet. A triumph that we should all celebrate."

Talking about Vance beating the robot telescopes, Belanger said, Vance has clearly demonstrated that we humans are not yet ready to be replaced by computer technology. He and other amateurs continue to make valuable contributions to the science of astronomy. Vance's discovery also raised the public profile of his fellow astronomers.

I hope that when Comet Petriew returns to the neighborhood in a few years, Vance and many other astronomers will be back here in the park watching for it, and that your star party will be bigger and better than ever and that amateur astronomers will continue to have a role in furthering our understanding of the cosmos."

Belanger's final comment was a message, that by looking up, we realize how precious our own earth is and to take care of our environment."

Petriew said, I was testing it (monument) out. It seems to be the same size as my telescope (20" reflector). If someone would have told me a year ago that I would discover a comet at a star party I would have said you must be mistaken. But, the comet discovery is real, and I am proud to have discovered it no more than 200 meters from where we are standing."

A thank you was given by Petriew to Minister Belanger and his office for recognizing the discovery of Comet Petriew in the Legislature.

Recognition also fell upon Cypress Hills Park. Petriew gave his opinion as to why he considers the SSSP as one of the best star parties in the world. As the 200 people that

were out last night enjoying the clear dark skies will attest, Saskatchewan truly is the 'land of living skies'." Earlier, Belanger did his impression of David Letterman and gave his top ten list of reasons this park is the best location for a star party in Canada.

Petriew singled out his friend and fellow astronomer, Richard Huziak for special recognition. It was his knowledge and experience of the night sky that late August night last year that turned this comet discovery into a reality."

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