



***** IAU0918: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 17 SEPTEMBER 2009 16:00 CEST *****

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Galilean Nights: Global Astronomy Event Invites the World to Discover Our Universe

17 September 2009, Paris: Wind the clock back 400 years and follow in the footsteps of a giant – experience now just what first amazed Galileo in 1609! The latest Cornerstone project of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009), Galilean Nights, will see thousands of public observing events around the world replicating Galileo’s observations and bringing what he saw 400 years ago to the public of today. From 22 to 24 October, amateur and professional astronomers, science centres, schools and all interested groups are invited to be part of the Galilean Nights project and to register their events on the project website www.galileannights.org. We can all make this a worldwide success.

The Galilean Nights builds on the unprecedented success of April’s 100 Hours of Astronomy, another IYA2009 Cornerstone project. Over three nights amateur and professional astronomers, and enthusiasts, will share their knowledge and enthusiasm for the Universe by encouraging as many people as possible to look through a telescope at our neighbouring planets. The focus for the Galilean Nights is on the observations made by the Italian astronomer Galileo 400 years ago, including those of Jupiter and the Moon, which will be well-positioned in the night sky for observing during the event. For many members of the public it will be their first look through a telescope, when they can see such breathtaking sights such as the cloud bands of the gas giant, Jupiter, and intricate details on our cratered Moon. It will be an unforgettable experience.

Anyone, from any background and with any level of experience is encouraged to organise events, from one person sharing the night sky through a telescope with a small group of neighbours and friends, to large astronomical groups holding major observing sessions in public areas. To keep track of developments, assist with promotion and to help people to find local Galilean Nights activities, all events should be registered on the project website: www.galileannights.org. Hundreds of events all over the world have already been registered and the number is increasing every day.

IYA2009 Executive Committee Chair, Catherine Cesarsky says, *“Amateur observations have always played an important role in astronomy, a fact highlighted by one of the most exciting events of this year when it was an amateur astronomer who noticed that Jupiter had suffered a massive impact by an asteroid or comet. So it is fitting that Galilean Nights continues this tradition as thousands of amateur astronomers and the public will turn their attention to Jupiter and other objects that Galileo observed 400 years ago.”*

Stunning images of distant objects in the Universe are well known around the world and do more to bring astronomy to the wider public and to inspire future astronomers than words ever could. The public have been set the challenge of capturing the inspirational nature of our local solar neighbourhood in the worldwide Galilean Nights photography competition. Run in partnership with Europlanet, the Galilean Nights competition encourages anybody

with an enthusiasm for astronomy to try a different approach to their observations and create their own inspirational photographs of our planetary neighbours. The contest is being officially launched today during Europlanet's European Planetary Science Congress, held this year in Potsdam, Germany.

Four hundred years since Galileo's telescopic observations revolutionised our view of the Universe, the public will once again be turning their attention to the heavens. People all around the world are encouraged to take part in the Galilean Nights Cornerstone project and experience for themselves the same sense of awe and wonder that Galileo must have felt.

Links

- Galilean Nights website: www.galileannights.org
- IYA2009 website: www.astronomy2009.org
- European Planetary Science Congress website: <http://meetings.copernicus.org/epsc2009/>

Notes

The vision of the IYA2009 is to help the citizens of the world rediscover their place in the Universe through the day and night-time skies the impact of astronomy and basic sciences on our daily lives, and understand better how scientific knowledge can contribute to a more equitable and peaceful society.

The aim of the IYA2009 is to stimulate worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme, "The Universe, Yours to Discover". IYA2009 events and activities will promote a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that embody an invaluable shared resource for all countries.

The IYA2009 activities are taking place at the global and regional levels, and especially at the national and local levels. National Nodes in each state have been formed to prepare activities for 2009. These Nodes establish collaborations between professional and amateur astronomers, science centres, educators and science communicators in preparing activities for 2009. The International Year of Astronomy was proclaimed by the United Nations on 20 December 2007.

For more information

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