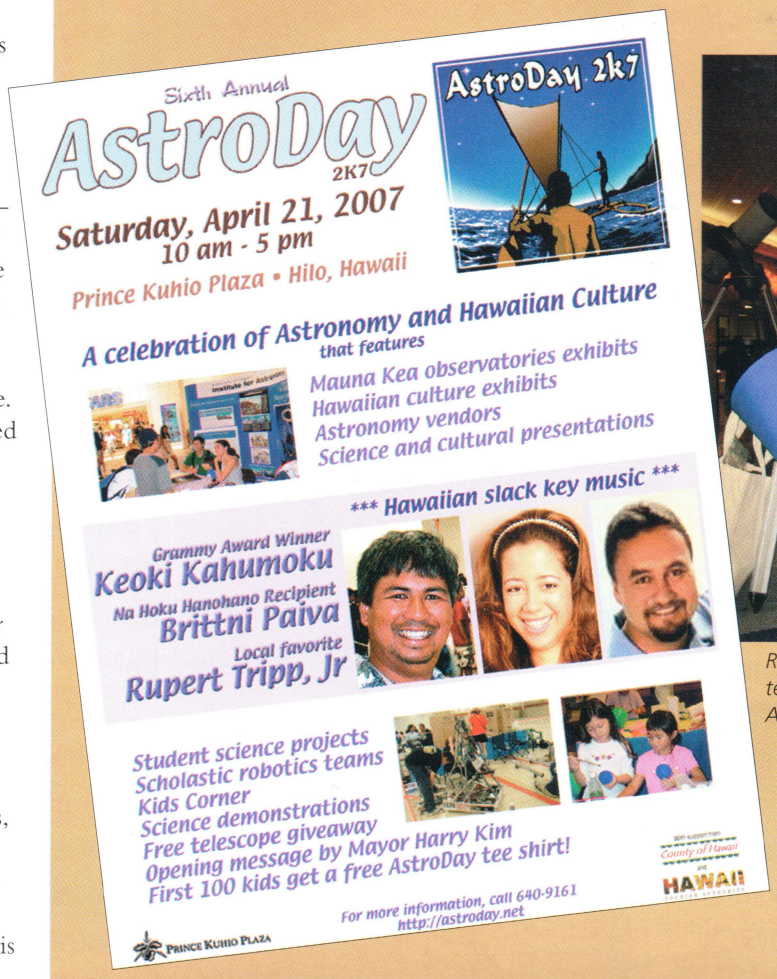
By Rickey Ainsworth

ASTRONOM

From the Middle East to the middle of the Pacific, the spirit of Astronomy Day continues to thrive globally. Since its inception in 1973, Astronomy Day's mission of "bringing astronomy to the people" has touched hundreds of thousands of lives. It is through the tireless efforts of amateur astronomers and their uncanny ability to generate community collaboration that Astronomy Day festivities on such a large scale are possible. This year's efforts resulted in some of the most creative and well-attended Astronomy Day events to date.

To be especially commended is Gary Fujihara's AstroDay Institute in Hilo, Hawaii, winner of the 2007 *Sky & Telescope* Astronomy Day Award. Industrious planning (which started on the *day after* Astronomy Day 2006) resulted in their biggest event ever, attracting over 15,000 people. Over thirty collaborating organizations (including astronomy clubs, observatories, educational institutions, cultural organizations and the media) helped to make the event a resounding success. It is inspiring to see an entire community come together in the name of astronomy and space education.

Visitors to AstroDay Institute festivities were treated to hands-on spacecraft simulators, a working Mars rover prototype from JPL, traditional storytelling and songs, Polynesian navigation demonstrations, telescope-making, observing, and much, much more. Exciting displays and contests lent an atmosphere of fun to the celebration, and the AstroDay Institute even reprised the souvenir infrared photography station that won them a **Best New Idea Award** in 2006. If you'd like to congratulate the AstroDay Institute on a job well done, you'd better do it quickly –



Ric Yamamoto — all smiles — with the telescope he won as a door prize at the AstroDay Institute in Hilo, Hawaii.

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An activity area in which children made comets packed the area as adults helped out.

AstroDay Institute visions statement: "To provide science education and outreach to the Hawaii Island community, with an emphasis on shared learning experiences."

Y DAY 2007

A computer screen displayed the infrared image from a camera in the AstroDay Institute's infrared photo booth, which created a souvenir image for those who entered.

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NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory's prototype Mars rover gave kids a unique back massage.

The many displays at the AstroDay Institute, including this one, drew crowds.

The world-renowned Waiakea Intermediate School Ukulele Band wowed the crowd in the Prince Kuhio Plaza.

they're already busy planning next year's event!

The AstroDay Institute emphasized regional history and culture and their connection to astronomy in their celebration, and so did the Astronomical Society of Iran, Amateur Committee, winner of this year's **Quality Events Year After Year Award**. In addition to a wide range of demonstrations and observing sessions, Astronomical Society of Iran volunteers taught the public about their country's historical contributions to astronomy. Costumed characters, representing famous Iranian and international astronomers from the pages of history, roamed through the crowds, teaching visitors about their lives and discoveries first-hand. Dramatically-inclined volunteers also presented another historical perspective by reenacting the trial of Galileo on-stage. In addition, the group offered an event packed with more traditional astronomy activities – observing, lectures, models, contests, and exciting hands-on activities designed to spark the imagination.

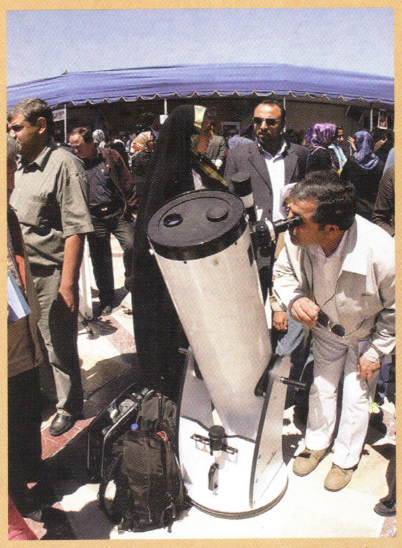
The massive scope of the Iran event is remarkable. As a country-wide initiative, encompassing 53 cities, this Astronomy Day celebration is

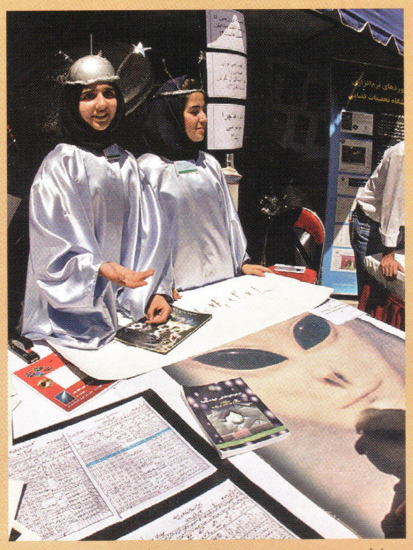
This Astronomy Day celebration is the world's largest

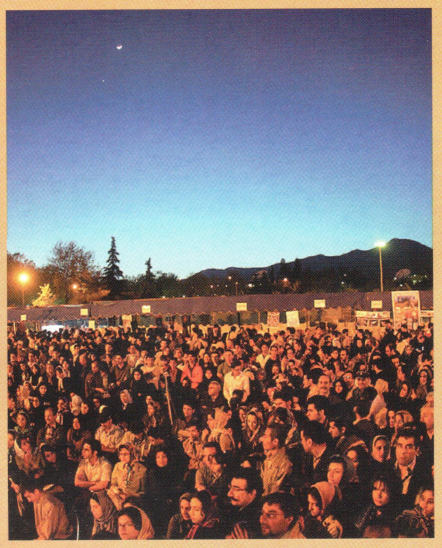
the world's largest. At the main Tehran event alone, over 40,000 people were in attendance. Collaboration with a wide range of scientific and educational organizations – and a massive media campaign that included posters, pamphlets, television, newspapers, and billboards – ensured that local residents wouldn't miss the festivities.

In the true spirit of Astronomy Day, the Astronomical Society of Iran, Amateur

ASTRONOMY DAY 2007

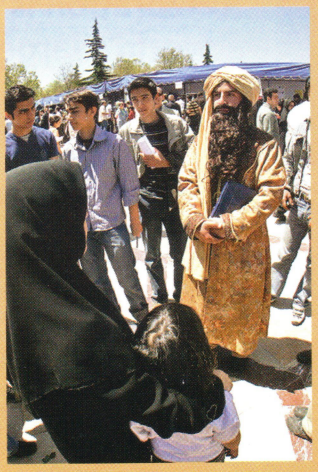






Left: *Solar observation in Tehran's Melat Park using a Dobsonian telescope operated by a member of Astronomical Society of Iran-Amateur Committee.* ***Center:*** *A display on Bad Astronomy covered how mainstream astronomy views UFOs, horoscopes and many popular misconceptions, as well as bad science about Mars, space travel, big full Moons, etc.* ***Right:*** *A night show started with a solar system lecture and slide show, which attracted a huge crowd to Melat Park, one of the busiest and biggest family parks in Tehran. Just behind the crowd, up in western sky, was a conjunction of the Moon and Venus — an eye-catching sight. Later in the evening images of the Moon and Venus were captured by an electronic eyepiece, then displayed on a large screen.*

Left: *The astronomy section for children was some about science and more about fun, especially face paintings with simple elements – the sun and planets.* ***Right:*** *Hanging over the crowd attending the daytime lectures and a question-and-answer session by ASIAC board members of editors of the Iranian astronomy magazine* Nojum *was a crane camera from Iranian TV4. A live Astronomy weekly TV program, Night Sky, has been on air for the past 7 years. The program has attracted many people to stargazing and space sciences.*



Left: *Members of ASIAC dressed as historic Persian astronomers such as Sufi (Azophi), Tusi, Biruni, while others dressed as historic Europeans such as Tycho Brahe, Cassini, Newton, and others. The actors spoke with people about the history of astronomy and old instruments.* ***Right:*** *The Galileo court theater attracted many people in the evening. Actors described how our view of the cosmos has changed through the time.*

ALL PHOTOS BY BABAK A. TAFRESHI AND AMIR H. ABOLFATH.

Committee also sent teams of telescope-toting volunteers to juvenile detention facilities, orphanages, nursing homes, and homes for children with mental disabilities. People who wouldn't normally be exposed to astronomy received the chance to see the wonders of the universe through a telescopic lens, many for the first time. With all of these activities, it seems that the Astronomical Society of Iran is clearly not resting on its laurels after last year's Astronomy Day Award win, and we can continue to expect great things from them in the future.

This year, the winner of the **Best for Its Size Award** goes to the Oglethorpe Astronomical Association in Savannah, Georgia. Operating on a shoestring budget, Oglethorpe worked with a variety of local organizations and a large group of student volunteers to attract over 1,000 visitors to their day-long event. Day and night observing took place alongside hands-on activities, displays, and contests at a local pier. Highlights of the event included guided tours of a 1,000-meter solar system model, and an astronomy-themed wedding reception in the afternoon that attracted scores of curious onlookers (many of whom stayed to participate in the Association's other activities).

Despite overcast skies, the Irish Federation of Astronomical Societies carried out a wonderful Astronomy Day event, mainly due to the idea that won them this year's **Best New Idea Award**. Expanding on their vision of charity partnership (having collaborated with the IAS and the Chernobyl Children's Project in the past), they joined together with the United Nations International Children's Fund to put on a special Astronomy Day fundraising event called "Look Up For UNICEF" to benefit children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. By forming this relationship, the Irish Federation of Astronomical Societies managed to introduce astronomy to new, unexpected audiences (including a large roster of local UNICEF donors) while helping a worthy cause. Thanks to this partnership, UNICEF has stated its willingness to do similar fundraisers with other astronomy organizations, both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Astronomy Day 2007 will go down in history as a tremendous success. Congratulations to the winners and to everyone who participated. With each new Astronomy Day event, more people around the world receive the chance to experience the wonder, majesty, and intrigue of the starry universe around us. And as the worldwide growth of Astronomy Day continues to gain momentum, this year's entries are sure to provide inspiration and ideas to even more organizations in the years ahead. ✶

Astronomy Day 2007 winners

Winner—AstroDay Institute

Quality Events Year After Year—
Astronomical Society of Iran, Amateur Committee

Best for Its Size—Oglethorpe Astronomical Association

Best New Idea—Irish Federation of Astronomical Societies

Honorable Mention—
Hamilton Amateur Astronomers
Kalamazoo Astronomical Society
Norman North Astronomy Classes & Club
Old Town Sidewalk Astronomers
Palmquist Road Observatory
Amateur Astronomers Association of Vadodara
Tri-County Astronomers
Warren Rupp Observatory and Astronomy for Youth

Jonathan Casselman, *a member of the Spokane Astronomical Society, took this image of the lunar eclipse, from Derk Park, Washington, at 4:45 a.m. PDT Aug. 28, 2007. He used an HP C500 digital camera pointed into a 40 mm SWA eyepiece that was attached to a 9.25-inch Celestron telescope. The exposure time was 2 seconds. Casselman noted that the photograph illustrates the bull's-eye effect – the dramatic contrast between the dark reddish-black umbra and the brilliant penumbra during the Moon's emergence from Earth's shadow. He took the images of Comet Holmes and the Moon on Oct. 26, 2007, using the same equipment. Exposure time for the Moon was 1/500th of a second, while the image of Comet Holmes was 2 seconds.*