

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT: OUTREACH

Outreach in South Africa is planned and practiced individually by all Centres and other private Observatories, with virtually no interaction with any other practitioners. All Centres, except Hermanus, have access to professional or private observatories. Centres normally schedule separate observation sessions as advertised on their respective websites. *Ad hoc* observing sessions are normally arranged on request from internal members or external groups such as the Voortrekkers, Girl Guides or other normally outdoor-oriented groups or associations (Explora or Hermanus Hiking).

In this sense the term “Outreach” refers to observing sessions aimed at exposing more people to Astronomy with the objective of increasing membership.

Star Parties and regular star-gazing events also stimulate an interest in the *practice* of Astronomy. Apart from regular star-gazing events planned by the Durban, Bloemfontein, Pretoria and Johannesburg Centres the following “private” groups also warrant appreciative mention:

- a. The Leeuwenboschfontein Observatory has monthly New Moon open Saturdays in addition to an annual Event Horizon Star Party in Spring.
- b. The Orion Observation Group (OOG) has picnics-cum-star-gazing on the Saturdays closest to the New Moon during summer months at the Taalmonument in Paarl.
- c. The Vegkop Star Party near Heilbron was a huge success during April and will hopefully become an annual event. Lafras Smit observed Omega Centauri through 27 different telescopes at the Star Party, which he has set as a challenge match or beat.

Using the totally different media of Radio, Facebook and WhatsApp Willie Koorts and his “RSG Sterre en Planete” 30 minutes programme broadcast on RSG at 19:30 on Sundays has been hugely influential and successful in stimulating an interest in Astronomy among the general population.

Willie is ably assisted by Prof Matie Hoffman, Jim Adams (retired Deputy Director: Technology of NASA), Dr Stephan Lotz (SANSO) and Lafras Smit.

At the time of writing the Facebook page “Hennie Maas se Ruimtespan” had 28,449 members and a separate WhatsApp group 1,730 members. These numbers are an eloquent testimony to “Sterre en Planete”’s popularity and effectiveness.

Against this background the ASSA Outreach page will refer interested parties to the websites of their nearest Centres or the non-Centre groups referred to above.

ASSA’s mission is to stimulate the study and practice of Astronomy, of which Outreach in all forms will always play a central role.