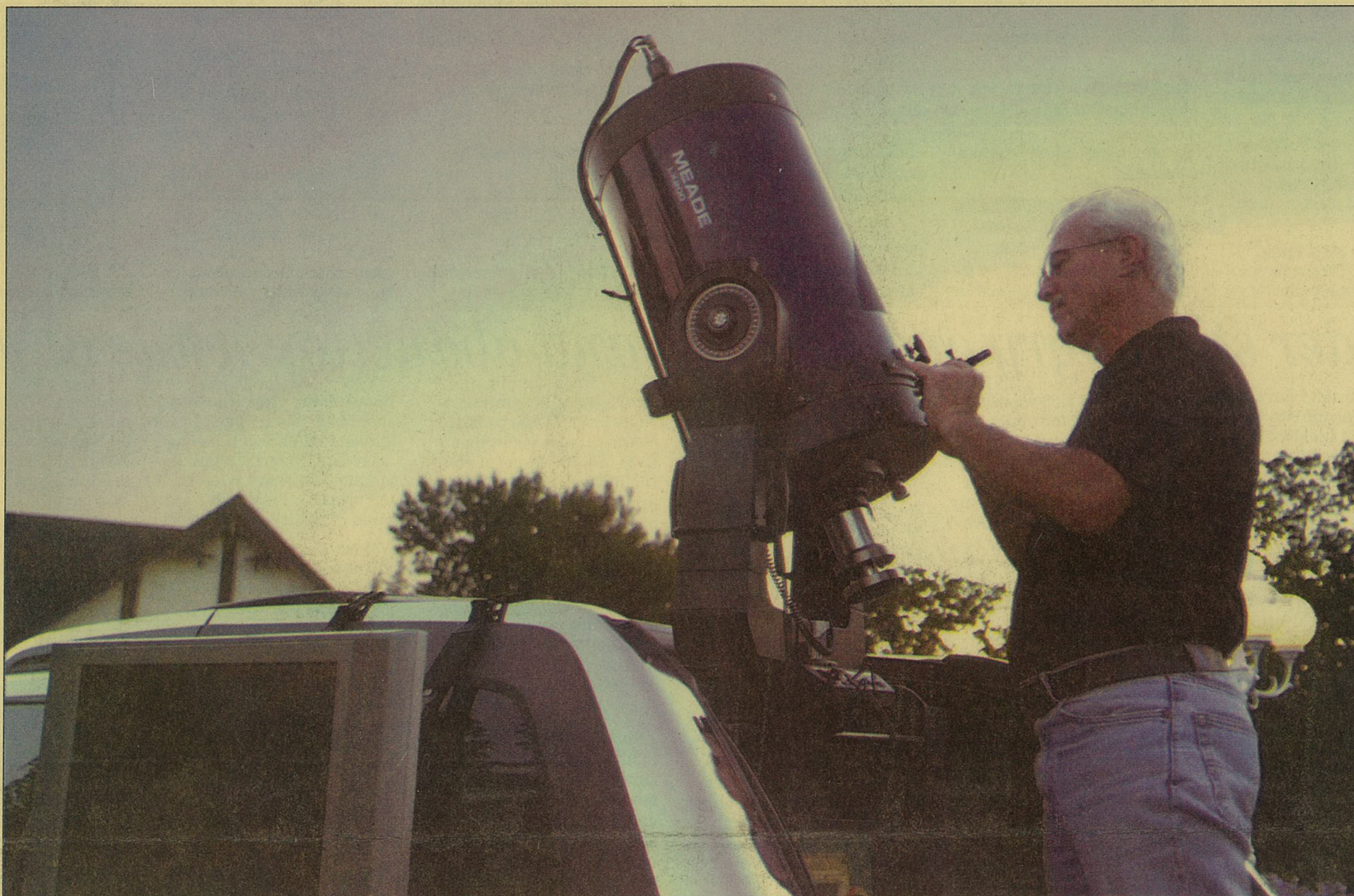


## Traveling Telescope



Elisha Page / Record Searchlight

**STAR SEEKER:** Norm Nasise adjusts his SUV-mounted telescope, which is raised from inside the vehicle with a mount that he created. Nasise said Red Bluff light pollution rendered his backyard observatory useless. Now he takes his rig to remote locales for stargazing.

# Red Bluff resident creates mobile observatory



**POINTING ABOVE:** Fully extended out of the SUV's sunroof, the mobile observatory looks like a "Ghostbusters" rig. But Nasise can take his stargazing hobby on the road, to dark and remote locations for optimal viewing.

By **Christy Lochrie**

*Record Searchlight*

A light bulb went on for Norm Nasise. It started with a glow over Red Bluff, the product of 70-watt, low-pressure, sodium street lights, illuminated parking lots and porches. Light that shines through the night sky swells with urban growth and casts its glow in all directions, including the heavens.

Astronomers call it light pollution — an incandescence that washes the Milky Way from the night's sky like a rag after spilled milk. City officials call it a public safety necessity — light that guides people after dark and helps reduce crime.

The backyard star-gazing observatory Nasise built 20 years

ago to view stars at night is all but useless with a glittering city backdrop.

"Because of light pollution in the area, the night's sky is basically gone," said the 56-year-old Nasise, who built his first telescope when he was 14.

The amateur astronomer and full-time gynecologist found a terrestrial solution to his star-gazing problem. He created a star-gazing rig in the back of a GMC Envoy that enables him to drive to areas with less light pollution.

Nasise and his wife, Laura, go on stargazing trips to Texas, Arizona, and closer to home near Lassen Peak and Mt. Shasta.

He designed and mounted an

See *Telescope*, E-2

*Continued from E-1*

“astrolift,” which raises a telescope lens out of the vehicle and includes gears to pivot the telescope 360-degrees for a panoramic view of the night sky. It takes about 10 minutes to set up and about as long to dismount, as opposed to the hour or so required with field equipment. Call it a mobile solution to a urban lighting and stargazing problem.

“The advantage of this is it’s already set up and ready to go,” Nasise said.

City light pollution is one of those unintended effects of urban growth and progress. Red Bluff requires street lights at intersections, on cul-de-sacs and at 400-foot intervals along streets, said Mark Barthel, the city’s public works director.

“As the city gets bigger, it gets brighter,” Barthel said. “It’s safety at intersections for pedestrians as well as vehicular traffic.”

And new home building codes require front- and rear-door lights, said Robert James, a Red Bluff building inspector.

“Light is a good thing,” James said. “People have been (advocating) this for



**COMPUTERIZED GAZING:** Nasise uses a laptop and global positioning system to locate stars and celestial objects. The night sky can also be viewed on the computer monitor.

*Elisha Page / Record Searchlight*

years so they can function in the dark.”

But it’s not a good thing for the astronomers, who complain that it clear-cuts stars from the night sky and robs them of a view that should in-

clude constellations, zodiac patterns and stars that ignite imaginations.

Light pollution “causes a dome of light over the city and therefore it blocks out the stars,” said Bob Thompson,

president of the Shasta Astronomy Club.

“Most people in the U.S. and Europe don’t have the ability to look up and see the Milky Way anymore,” said Rick Fienberg, editor in chief for Sky & Telescope mag-

azine.

Meanwhile, Nasise hopes to sell his mobile stargazing units. He launched Star Chaserz, Inc. ([www.astrolifts.com](http://www.astrolifts.com) or 529-0774) and took his rig to the Riverside Telescope Makers Conference in May, where he hoped to entice potential customers with his idea.

Nasise estimates a bare-bones system — just the astrolift and batteries — will run a customer about \$4,500. He figures the whole shebang — a customer-purchased telescope, computer, flat-screen monitors for computerized star-viewing and stabilizing jacks to keep a vehicle still — will run a stargazer about \$17,000.

Fienberg, the editor in chief for Sky & Telescope, met the Nasises at the conference and wrote about their rig in an article.

“Every few years somebody builds something like this and it always draws some attention,” Fienberg said. “It’s not unprecedented, but it’s pretty rare.”

Fienberg recalled an ambulance that was transformed into a mobile observatory a few years ago. Interesting concept, but it required a dome room, which threatened to blow away while motoring

down a highway.

“What’s neat about this one was being able to elevate it out of the top so you can transport it without the dome on top,” Feinberg said. “You just lower your telescope, close the sunroof and off you go.”

And the flat-screen monitors, which mount on the side windows, make for a group viewing experience — a plus for school groups, which the Nasises hope to educate with stargazing field trips.

Derek Lillie, a 48-year-old Los Angeles astronomer, parked his Hummer H3 next to the Nasises at the Riverside conference. He’s paying Nasise \$7,000 to install the astrolift, batteries, chargers and stabilizing jacks. He’s also getting a video output from his electronic telescope into the Hummer’s backseat DVD system.

“Someone inside the car can see what’s on the telescope,” Lillie said, adding that his wife chills during late-night stargazing excursions and would prefer to gaze at the sky in warmth.

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## THE NAME GAME / C-1

Garcia, Els, DiMarco, Furyk within two of Woods entering final round of Open



## HEAVEN SENT / E-1

Amateur astronomer created own mobile telescope for stargazing



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