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MAIN EVENT GALLERY

Astrophotography to be featured in Red Bluff

Daily News staff

Astronomer and astrophotographer Norman Nasise, M.D., peered at the moon for the first time at age 12 through his neighbor's eight-inch telescope, built from WWII surplus parts and he has been obsessed with astronomy ever since. A life long love of the dark sky has resulted in he and astrophotographer Brent Simons capturing stunning images through their telescopes of the vibrant colors and details of stars, planets, nebula and other celestial phenomena from the deep galaxies of space light years away.

Nasise is one of the featured artists along with Jeff Fennel and Brent Simon in the Main Event Gallery's "Art of the Galaxy, Out of this World" exhibit Aug. 20 through Sept. 25, to include gallery artist's renderings of the universe. An opening reception is 5:30-8 p.m. Friday, Aug. 20 at 710 Main St., Red Bluff.

Nasise always had an interest in science. Being a child of the space race, he stayed home from school and watched every Mercury launch from Alan Shepherd to Gordon Cooper. By age 14, he constructed his own telescope and remembers being awed by the rings of Saturn and the bands stretching across Jupiter.

His first telescope camera was and old bellows camera he talked a camera shop owner out of.

"I mounted it to the telescope tube and took prime focus photos of the moon, adjusting the focus until was sharp on a piece of ground glass at the back of the camera," Nasise said. "Then loaded the camera with a roll of film and began snapping."

Nasise thought they were great, however by today's standards said they were horrible, but he still has them.

He couldn't wait for his Sky and Telescope magazine to arrive so he could run to his room and go through the pages. Nasise was hooked on telescope making and astronomy. Coming to the end of his college career, he had to decide whether to be a cosmologist, astrophysicist or a physician. He chose medicine with astronomy as his hobby.

Wanting to live in a dark sky area for his astronomy, Nasise and his wife Laura



CONTRIBUTED

"Orion Nebula M42, Distance 1,344 Light Years," astrophotography composed by Starchaserz Norman Nasise and Brent Simon.

moved to Red Bluff in 1984 where he set up his medical practice. Laura loved astronomy too. She grew up near one of the designated Dark Sky Sanctuaries in California.

Nasise built an observatory in his back yard. It housed his 20-inch telescope with a sky camera and computerized equipment. But 10 years later several big businesses had moved into the area causing the unintended effect of light pollution washing away the heavens of the night sky for astronomers.

"Tired of my complaining, Laura came up with a unique idea," said Nasise. "She had seen an advertisement in a magazine for a GMC Envoy with a retractable roof. She suggested that with this type of vehicle I could place a telescope within the cargo bay, and could use it at any location that I desired. It was at that moment the idea of our mobile observatory was born."

Nasise invented and built a lift to elevate his 14-inch telescope with a computer designed specifically for his mobile observatory. A videocam and digital camera were attached to the telescope, which linked to a flat screen monitor mounted the outside of the vehicle for direct real time viewing of deep sky objects, planets or the moon.

Nasise and his wife Laura wanted to give back to youth and the community and all those who have a love of the heavens. They co-founded a non-profit company, Starchaserz, Inc. Its mission is to promote

public awareness, education, appreciation and preservation of one of our most precious and often overlooked natural resources — the night sky.

They have traveled extensively with the mobile observatory, giving public and private star shows, going to schools, scouting events, colleges and the national parks. Every year they set up for viewing at Lassen Park's Dark Sky Festival, with large gatherings.

To continue their mission, Nasise has built a more expansive state of the art observatory with three powerful telescopes equipped with videocam and sky cameras. He's developing a website where both live and virtual events will be offered. Star parties and live video broadcasts will be transmitted in real time to be viewed by anyone. The session will be interactive where a person 5,000 miles away can ask questions or make a specific request to see a particular galaxy. A mobile observatory will be set up at the Dye Creek Preserve in Los Molinos.

Assisting Nasise will be Mike Ryan, a former presenter at the Morrison Planetarium in San Francisco sharing as the narrator of the images he receives from Nasise's telescope in Red Bluff.

Brent Simons, a retired engineer and astrophotographer, will be in charge of transmissions of the images and have remote control of the telescopes. They plan to have the website up

and running soon at www.starchaserz.org.

After retiring, Brent Simons relocated to Red Bluff from the Bay Area for the dark sky. He too has been interested in astronomy from an early age. His first night here he saw the incredible sky and he knew it was the right place to build his observatory and pursue astrophotography, capturing spectacular images with his telescope's digital imaging camera.

Nasise said he hasn't had any formal training in astrophotography. He credits his friend Simons for being his mentor. The incredible images in this exhibit are by both Nasise and Simons. They have worked together to compose and process them.

Nasise's obsession for astronomy is evident through his astrophotography and as he speaks passionately about the universe.

"I'm most inspired by the vastness of space," Nasise said. Our own Milky Way Galaxy has two billion stars in it and we are one of two billion galaxies. The universe is incredible. A lot of it is beyond what we will ever see, because it is expanding faster than the speed of light can bring it to us. If there is a miracle out there, it's got to be the universe."

The Starchaserz Mobile Observatory will be parked outside the gallery during the reception. The exhibit is sponsored by the Tehama County Arts Council.

Gallery hours 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays.