

Dudley Observatory Board of Trustees
Minutes of the Meeting on
May 7, 2008

Members present: Sam Wait (Chair), Alan French, Mary Crone Odekon, James B. Comly, Janie Schwab, Vincent Amodeo, Erin Breslin, Lucy Comly, Ellen Fladger, Jean Sheviak, Robert Ward

Members absent: Ray Bogucki, Susan French, Brian Mercy, Heidi Jo Newberg, Cherrice Traver, Daniel Wulff

Guest: Norm Miller (representing the Challenger Learning Center)

Sam Wait called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

The board approved the minutes of the meeting on March 3, 2008.

The board approved the minutes of the special meeting on April 26, 2008, amended to list the board members who were absent.

Report on the Challenger Center

Norm Miller described the plans for opening a Challenger Learning Center (CLC) in the Schenectady Museum in the Fall of 2009. The CLC will lease space at the Museum in a manner that might be similar a potential collaboration between Dudley and the planned Science Center of Tech Valley. There are currently 54 CLCs nationally, with a mix of stand-alone centers and centers attached to museums and institutions of higher learning. The CLC program will involve teacher training and a state-approved educational program, followed by a visit to the Museum for students to use a space transporter simulator. Norm spoke positively about his interactions with the Museum and answered several questions from Dudley board members about the arrangement. The CLC plans to lease 2300 square feet, plus space for offices, in the Museum, and later it will lease 5000 square feet in the new Science Center. The Schenectady CLC has received funding from Sen. Farley as well as from private donations. Norm noted that the CLC president, Heidi DeBlock, has been on the NASA Medical Staff.

Report of the Executive Director

Janie Schwab distributed the report of the executive director, highlighting several recent and upcoming events. Dudley will participate in "The Planets Night" at SPAC on August 22, when the Philadelphia Orchestra will be playing Holst's The Planets. Planned activities include a slide show, observing with Rising Star interns, give-aways, and possibly a visit from an astronaut. We are free to solicit sponsors; SPAC will provide tables, advertising banners, etc. Other upcoming events that may involve Dudley are the San Luis 100th anniversary (the observatory in Argentina used by Dudley), the Henry Hudson Quadricentennial, and the Conference on New York State History.

Janie reported on the Northeast Astronomical Forum in April and the Antique Telescope Society workshop in May. Janie noted in particular the enthusiasm expressed by other participants at the workshop for the Dudley, and the recent success of the Cincinnati Observatory (whose business plan she had forwarded to the Board). As described in detail in Janie's written report, several specific suggestions for Dudley arose at the Antique Telescope Society workshop, including exhibit design and rare book lectures. Jim mentioned that UCALL would probably be interested in co-sponsoring such lectures.

The board discussed other possible lessons to be learned from the workshop, including developing a diverse board, developing the Friends of Dudley and other volunteers to begin and run projects like November's Gala (Jim), and having a teacher on the Dudley board who knows modern astronomy (Janie).

Janie announced grants from the Ronald McDonald House Charities (\$5048) and Sen. Farley (\$4000) toward the Rising Star Internship program, and she credited Nancy Buxton for her help in proposal writing.

Report of the Library Committee

Ellen Fladger reported that there is an upcoming meeting with librarian Dorothy Barnes.

Report of the Education Committee

Alan French distributed the report of the Education Committee. He highlighted the Rising Star Internship program, noting that Dan Mancuso won the Hessberg Award, and that there are 11 new Rising Star Interns, including 2 teachers. The awards ceremony will take place on Tuesday, May 27 at the Discovery Center in the Pine Bush. Alan and Janie emphasized that we have the funds to recruit more rising star interns, and that there will be a second round of applications.

Report on Skywatch Lectures

Mary Odekon and Alan French reported that Dava Sobel and John Delano are lined up to give Skywatch lectures at Proctors on October 9 and November 13. Mary is looking into getting Neil deGrasse Tyson for the December lecture. More details about the Skywatch Series are included in Alan's Education Committee report, and Mary will distribute information about over email.

Sam suggested that Dudley might arrange a performance or reading of "Background," the play about Ralph Alpher.

Report of the Finance & Physical Plant Committee

Jim Comly distributed the Dudley Finance report, noting that while our endowment has lost 5%, we are doing relatively well for the current market. Our budget is based on 5% of the endowment at the beginning of the year. Jim and Lucy pointed out that we could choose other algorithms such as 5% of a three year average, or 5% plus inflation.

Sam summarized the status of the Sealtest building as a possible site for the Dudley Observatory. While the price of the building is \$500k, the total cost – including a new roof, HVAC, and energy-efficient windows – would be \$2M, which the board agreed is beyond our current budget.

Janie is setting up a meeting to visit the Pine Bush, another possible Dudley site.

Update on Schenectady Science Center

Jim Comly, Lucy Comly, and Sam Wait summarized the status of our interactions with the Schenectady Museum, including the exchange of letters that was distributed by email to the Board, the lunch with Neil Levine and Kerry Orlyk on April 16, and the discussion at the April 24 board meeting. A major focus of the discussion was the need to have more open dialog with the Museum, which we hope will be encouraged by having Erin Breslin as an active member of the Dudley Board. Erin said that she (and the Museum in general) is very invested in the Science Center project, and that she takes the concerns of the Dudley board seriously. In particular, she said that when a decision is eventually made about whether the Science Center is a good fit for Dudley, that decision should be made for the right reasons and not for lack of open communication.

Report of the Nominating Committee

Sam Wait distributed the report of the Nominating Committee, and presented recommendations from the nominating committee to accept with regret the resignation of Ellen Fladger effective July 1, 2008 when she reaches the end of her term and to appoint her as Trustee Emeritus, to accept with regret the resignation of Becky Koopmann effective May 6, 2008, to appoint Thomas McFadden, Director of Schaffer Library at Union College to a four-year term from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2012, and to approach Karl Luntta, Director of Media Relations at SUNY Albany.

The Board supported these recommendations, and thanked Ellen Fladger for her years of service to Dudley.

Sam also noted that Steve Russo has been replaced by Erin Breslin as the delegate for the Director of the Schenectady Museum.

Sam noted that that Dudley is authorized to have 19 board members, whereas we currently have 12. Janie suggested that we look for members with backgrounds in media, fundraising, law, and the history of astronomy.

Sam Wait adjourned the meeting at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Crone Odekon, Dudley Board Secretary