

# News

## Observatory Night Draws Crowds at Central Campus

By Jeremy Coughlin

Once a month every semester, the college hosts a community night, opening up the observatory to amateur astronomers, students, and the community. This is a great opportunity for anyone who loves to look up at the night sky. On the last and final one for the semester on November 10, Professor Kelly

Spangler, an astronomy and physics teacher for MCCC, was standing at the top of the observatory, beneath the opened hatch of the tower. She wasn't farther than two feet away from the school's impressively large sixteen-inch Meade LX200-GPS telescope. As she sidled around the edges of the raised platform where the telescope stood, she welcomed an-

other batch of amateur astronomers, students, and curious first time participants with a quick introduction. She began by explaining that the group was quite lucky; even though there was a good deal of cloud cover, we would still be able to get a fantastic view of the moon. The Professor also kindly explained what the observers would actually get to look at on the Moon, which was a crater named Tycho.

The wait in line was around twenty minutes, but fortunately, it was well worth it. I have never seen an image of the Moon so startlingly bright and crisp, not to mention large. It was actually difficult to pull myself away from the eyepiece. After I had finally torn myself back and moved away from the telescope, I took the time to ask Prof. Spangler a couple of questions. One in particular touched on the amount of people on the stairs, which she said was "like a line for a ride at Disney world." The Professor wasn't lying either; the line to view the telescope wound down a flight of stairs and out of sight. Over the course of that night, the observatory enthralled about a hundred pairs of eyes with its extraordinary views of the Moon and stars.

However, the observatory wasn't the only attraction that night. Out on the third floor's observation deck, fifteen or so amateur astronomers had an incredible array of different telescopes. Of the different types I saw, the first I came across was ten-inches wide and sported an unbelievably huge view of the Moon. Owned by Thanome Voravongdy, the telescope was literally a giant tube filled with mirrors, each one enlarging the object in focus, which happened to be the Moon. Born in Laos and working as a printer for the Salvation Army,

Thanome is an avid amateur astronomer who can be found using his telescope on most community nights here at the college.

Another group of stargazers that I got a chance to talk to were ones that were obviously the most knowledgeable men on deck. Jim Hoffman and Ray Middleton had both been studying the sky for over sixty years. Ray, sporting a 180x magnification telescope, explained his obsession with the stars, saying that he "can't remember a time when he didn't want to look up at the sky." When not focusing the moon, planets, or stars perfectly in his scope, Ray was giving up his seat to children, and anyone who wanted a glimpse through his powerful telescope. While I was talking to both Jim and Ray, Jim Hoffman handed out some truly amazing information on astronomy and telescopes. Jim helped to describe to me the different types of telescopes on deck, talking about lenses, their history, and even the different types of light refraction inside the scopes!

While community nights are usually once a month, they've finished up for this semester, and will resume in February, along with Troop Tuesdays, an activity for local Boy Scout Troops which allows them to utilize the scope. Since this is the astronomy tower's first year in use, Prof. Spangler has told me that she is still unclear on what kind of events will run during the summer, but she said that she is ironing out the details. I encourage every student to make it out to a community night at the observatory and to make this amazing astronomy course asset a part of the community as well. To find out more information about community night dates, and the astronomy department, check out [www.mc3.edu/aa/observatory/](http://www.mc3.edu/aa/observatory/).

## Alumni Star of November: K. William Lowa III

By Renee Bergandino, Managing Editor

Our alumni star for December is K. William Lowa III, who graduated from Montgomery County Community College in 1974. Since graduating, Bill Lowa has been a very busy man. He is the president of The Lowa Group, which has handled all types of personal and commercial benefits in the tri-state area for more than 25 years.

Bill started off as a police officer, graduating from MCCC with a degree in police science. For five years, Bill worked in law enforcement, and for two years out of those five, he was a detective in the Pottstown area. Unfortunately, due to a leg injury, he was required to retire from the force. He then became a fraud and field investigator for the Erie Insurance Group in Allentown, Pa. In 1980, Bill was named the northeastern district manager for Erie and was then transferred to Wilkes-Bare, Pa. After his transfer, Bill was promoted to district sales manager of Southeastern PA and moved back to Pottstown in 1981. In 1985, he purchased the Hallman Insurance Agency, renaming it in 1991 as The Lowa Group, Inc.

He joined the college's Foundation Board of Directors in 1997, and served as the chairperson. Bill also served on the Board of Directors of the Tri-County Chamber of Commerce for many years, including several years as the chairman. While a member of the chamber, Bill was involved in bringing the College's West Campus to Pottstown.



Photo courtesy of MCCC PR Office

Bill Lowa and his family in the ATC.

**Editor's Note:** One Alumni Hall of Fame inductee will be profiled in each of the next six issues.