

New comet easily seen this week

By Joshua Gillin
Staff Reporter

MEAD — In a cold room a few miles outside of Mead, Don Taylor stood watching a silent visitor.

The visitor, measuring thousands of miles across and millions of miles long, made no sound as it crept slowly across the heavens.

But Taylor knew its name — Comet Hyakutake.

Taylor, an associate professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, had been waiting to see this comet at its closest this week.

As director of the Behlen Observatory at the University of Nebraska Agricultural Research and Development Center, located just outside of Mead, Taylor said he hoped there would be no problems when he decided to open the center to the public Monday night.

But a spring blizzard made things difficult for curious stargazers.

"Mother Nature didn't seem to want to cooperate," he said. "It's like when you want to wash your car and it rains."

Taylor said the snow on the ground reflected moonlight, brightening the sky and hampering the view for the dozens of amateur astronomers who came to the observatory to see the comet.

The cold also forced many people to leave the observatory sooner than planned. With temperatures dropping

below freezing in the dome, several skywatchers peered through the 30-inch telescope for only a few moments before retreating to the heated lower level.

"We don't heat this place very much," Taylor said, kicking at a mound of snow in the corner. "Most of the time nowadays when we're collecting data and doing the research, the observer is downstairs in a warm room in front of a computer screen."

But Taylor, bundled up in a parka, stocking cap and snow boots, said he didn't mind the cold.

"Used to be, in the old days when I did more observing, you'd be up here looking through the telescope yourself," he said. "There weren't that many computers; cold as it was, that's what it was."

Taylor said astronomers came across unexpected comets, such as Hyakutake, once or twice a decade, though the comets usually don't come as close to Earth as this one.

According to the UNL department of physics and astronomy, Comet Hyakutake came to within an estimated 9.5 million miles from Earth on Tuesday.

Taylor said Hyakutake was the brightest comet to come this close to Earth in almost 400 years. He said it was difficult to calculate when it would return.

"(Hyakutake's) orbit is an extremely long ellipse," he said. "That makes it difficult to determine how

long it will take the comet to return."

Estimates have ranged anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 years, he said. "The eccentricities vary from publication to publication," he said.

"It certainly won't be back in any of our lifetimes."

Monday night's open observatory marked Behlen's annual spring open house. Because of the comet, Taylor said he scheduled the open house a month early.

"It gives the people a little something special to look at," he said.

Taylor said seeing Hyakutake was a rare chance that everyone with some free time should take advantage of.

"You don't really need to look through the telescope to see the comet," he said. "It's so close and so bright; it's like trying to look at a whole statue with a microscope."

"Get out a pair of binoculars, if you've got them — that's about the best thing to look at it with."

Taylor said there may be a chance for stargazers to see another comet next year. Comet Hale-Bopp is due sometime next spring, he said, and it hopefully will be even easier to see than Hyakutake.

But there is still time to see Hyakutake, he said.

"It's going to be visible until late April, even though this week is the best time to see it," he said. "And I highly recommend to everyone that they take the time to see it."

Bishop's decision gets mixed response

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Reporter

Roman Catholic students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have mixed reactions to a bishop's order banning Catholics from certain groups.

Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz announced last week that Catholics in the Diocese of Lincoln are forbidden to be members in organizations such as Planned Parenthood, Catholics for a Free Choice, Call to Action and Eastern Star.

Catholics who remain in those organizations after April 15 risk being excommunicated.

"I didn't like them telling us what we can or can't do," said Kim Rutten, a senior psychology major.

Rutten said she didn't feel the church had the right to tell members they couldn't belong to those groups.

The church would especially alienate younger worshippers like herself, Rutten said. College-aged

Catholics are questioning their beliefs, she said, but Catholic leaders aren't giving them the right answers.

"They're not backing them up with things we can relate to today."

Ann Royal, a junior sociology major, said the church was getting too involved in personal issues.

Royal said the church needed to separate its authority in religious matters from people's personal interests.

"I was upset about it because a lot of those organizations weren't harming the Catholic religion."

Mark Augustine, a junior undeclared major, said the bishop's declaration would force Catholics in those groups to re-evaluate their faith.

He said Catholics knew the church didn't share the same beliefs as those groups. Catholics are free to pursue their interests, he said, but they should only take part in activities approved by the church.

"For some, it will pull them back to the church, some it will push away," Augustine said.

Combs speaks to students

By Todd Anderson
Staff Reporter

Patrick Combs might have lost to Rep. Doug Bereuter in 1994, but he succeeded in delivering his message to the people of Nebraska's First Congressional District.

Combs, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for Congress, spoke to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Young Democrats on Tuesday night in the Nebraska Union.

"I'm mad at the arrogance of the people we elect," he said. "There are Democrats and Republicans out there who have taken advantage of the system."

"The U.S. House of Representatives is meant to be a body of younger, more energetic people with a vision, not a body of older, staunch officials who have been around for several terms."

Legislation requiring term limits is not necessary because there is a term limit system built in, he said.

"Vote people out when they're not doing their job," he said. "That's term limits."

Combs said he was disappointed with voter apathy in this country.

"It's a tragedy," he said. "And the people who don't vote are the first to complain about problems."

ASUN to inaugurate '96-'97 officers

The IMPACT party will hand the reins to ACTION tonight at the inauguration of the newly elected officers of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska.

President-elect Eric Marintzer — along with first vice president-elect Jason Bynum, second vice president-elect Kara Marshall and other newly elected representatives — will be inaugurated at 7:30 p.m. in the Wick Alumni Center, follow-

ing a short ASUN meeting.

And outgoing ASUN president Shawntell Hurtgen said she hoped ACTION would pick up where IMPACT left off.

"I really hope to see advising continued as a prominent issue and also to check on administrators to make sure they are following up on advising as well," she said.

Hurtgen said the establishment of a 24-hour computer lab in the

Nebraska Union and further progress in advising were among IMPACT's and ASUN's best accomplishments this year.

The student body's choice of "outstanding educator" also will be unveiled at tonight's inauguration. Students voted on their favorite instructors in the recent ASUN election.

— Kasey Kerber



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