

Influence the Future

One particular clear night years ago, you likely gazed at the heavenly realm and, although you may not have realized it at the time, it changed your life. Perhaps you were a teenager who visited a public event hosted by the local astronomy club. After standing expectantly in line, you peered for the first time through a telescope at M42, with its stellar sprinklings embedded throughout its wispy regions, and its four closely packed Trapezium stars shining in the central glow, sharply bordered by dark nebulae. What a marvelous sight for a young person to encounter!

We want to make sure that curious young people today have that same experience that leads to that same sense of discovery, and results in that same sense of wonderment. Most of all, we want to make sure that these young observers stay in the hobby long after that first enticing celestial sight.

The thrill of being at the eyepiece examining some enchanting wonder, the fun of sharing the night sky with others, the clarity in writing about what lies above, and the satisfaction of imaging what glows near the edge of visual perception—all of these things encompass much of our amazing avocation. They are also activities that young observers pursue.

Studying about our universe, then investigating deeper to learn more about the cosmos are also part of what we do. This is also the challenge that the young researcher rises to accept. Finally, communicating that knowledge in a passionate, factual way allows others to share in the exploration.

Think back to when you entered the hobby. Wouldn't it have been great to have been acknowledged in some manner for your active interest in astronomy? Imagine how that might have affected your future, not just regarding astronomy, but your life in general. Now, think of how the right recognition might influence an interested young person today.

Over the past twenty-two years, the Astronomical League has administered award programs with young observers, young researchers, and young science journalists in mind. The National (Outstanding) Young Astronomer Award began spotlighting individual research efforts in 1993, with an award presented to Blake Warren Thomas of Edgewood, New Mexico.



In 1998, the Horkheimer Youth Service Award followed, by commending Heather Ann Harland, a high school junior in Vidor, Texas, for her astronomy service to her club and community. The Astronomical League now annually offers ten—yes, ten!—different paths to acknowledge young people's love of the night sky or their desire to learn more about this incredible universe.

Each winner receives an attractive commemorative plaque, and, depending on



Adam Forte (1999 Horkheimer Award): Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Arizona State University in the School of Earth Science and Space Exploration



Ryan Hannahoe (2001 Horkheimer Award): Middle school science teacher at Clancy School near Helena, Montana, and director of STEM camps at the Montana Learning Center



Courtney Flonta (2011 Horkheimer/Smith Award): Pursuing a career in pharmacy technology



Max Moe (2003 NYAA, "Demographic and Atmospheric Effects on the Quality of the Night Sky"): 2015 PhD in astrophysics from Harvard University and the Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

the specific details of each award program, an expense-paid trip to ALCon and either a fine telescope by Explore Scientific or a cash prize of \$250 to \$1750 from the Horkheimer Charitable Fund. Other sponsors, such as Celestron, often contribute generously to defray important administrative expenses.

The purpose of this awards program, as counterintuitive as it may first seem, is not simply to encourage students to become professional astronomers. No, it is more than that.

It is to open young minds to examine where their futures may lead.

It is to open young hearts to a lifelong love of the night sky.

It is to show that amateurs across the country respect the activities of young

observers, letting them know that amateur astronomy is a worthwhile avocation.

For these ten awards to be presented, though, ten qualified, deserving individuals need to be nominated. They are not going to nominate themselves—a caring and respected adult must step forward. Doing so just may affect, in the most positive way, a person's life for years to come.

Influence the future, nominate the young!

John Jardine Goss
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