



Darker is better for star watchers

by Edith Page

We have three general categories of people interested in reducing light pollution or retaining our dark skies.

In the first category would be the professional astronomer. Many years ago, observers whom we now recognize as geniuses in their field, did not face problems confronting the modern astronomer. If they had, perhaps they would not have made such tremendous discoveries.

With present light conditions, could Galileo, with a telescope of only 30 powers, have detected four of the moons of our planet Jupiter?

With our powerful telescopes today, we can now go far beyond the discoveries of Galileo; but as our knowledge increases, so does our need to reach out farther into the universe. Scientists are hampered by what is called night-glow, a pollution that is a threat to a major scientific industry in the state.

Most offensive are the high-intensity mercury vapor lights, which should be replaced by low-pressure sodium vapor lights.

The second category includes the amateur astronomer who may have come to the Desert Foothills to get away from metropolitan lights. The amateur may be working in a personal way or he could be making valuable contributions to the scientific community by performing observations or tasks that are important.

In the final category are the many people who just enjoy observing the wonders of the universe.

You may ask why this type of subject matter belongs in the weekly column of the Conservation Committee. It is as important to preserve the quality of skies above us as it is to care for the earth below and around us.

One result of the recent survey conducted by the Conservation Committee indicated a deep concern for the loss of clear night skies. How many of these responses came through an awareness of the importance to science or how many were indicating a simple interest in looking up and appreciating the beauty of our galaxy, cannot be determined. But wouldn't it be nice to continue to look up and "wish upon a star"?

We suggest that you assess the outdoor lighting on your property. Have you installed a "dusk to dawn" mercury vapor light when perhaps a light of lower intensity would be adequate for your security?

Do you shield or direct your lights downward in order not to annoy neighbors?

Perhaps some of your lights are not even necessary.

Tuesday, June 19, will be the last meeting of the Conservation Committee until Sept. 18. The committee meets at 7:30 p.m. in the Cave Creek School library.