



Eagle River Nature Center News

No. 45 Member Newsletter ~February/March 2010 ~ Connecting People with Nature

Meet Scott Girard

by Chris Lundgren

Scott Girard's favorite planet is Mars. "Mars has lots of neat stuff happening, with so many missions and discoveries there," said the long-time Nature Center volunteer and amateur astronomer. Yet when given an opportunity to learn about anything in the solar system, he doesn't discriminate. In fact, he once flew all the way up to Barrow to witness the transit of Venus across the face of the sun. Another time, after a business trip in Australia, he stayed on another week to observe the sky in the Southern Hemisphere.

Scott holds a BS in electrical engineering and an MS in engineering management from University of Alaska at Fairbanks, but he is a self-directed scholar when it comes to astronomy. "It's all driven by my own curiosity and passion for what goes on in space," he said.

Unlike most amateur astronomers, Scott has taken his passion a giant step further. He is a Solar System Ambassador for the NASA-affiliated Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, California. That means he shares information about the Jet Propulsion Lab's space exploration missions with classrooms in the Anchorage Bowl and beyond. Nature Center audiences have enjoyed his talks covering Mars, Venus, the moon, space-based astronomy tools and other subjects.

As a Solar System Ambassador, Scott gets the scoop on the Jet Propulsion Lab's missions to Mars and other developments before the general public does. "They'll hold a phone conference with all the ambassadors, and we can talk to the Mars Rover scientists and engineers," he said. "We get to hear the latest and greatest before the press or anyone hears."

Of course, Scott reads whatever he can about space, and he is a history buff as well. Outside of his job as an electrical engineer at Chugach Electric, he also spends time hiking, biking and otherwise enjoying the outdoors with his family—wife, Kim, an artist and teacher in Chugiak Elementary School's Spanish Immersion Program, eleven-year-old daughter Makenna and nine-year-old son Torrin.

Scott and Torrin both study karate at the Alaska Moving Arts Center in Eagle River. "Pursuing karate is harder than my two engineering degrees," he said. "It's an envelope-pushing avocation."

cont. on next page



Save these dates:

February 25, 6pm
Planning for the Future of the Nature Center: A Public Forum to introduce concepts for selected site. See www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/

March 14, 5-8pm
Night with the Stars
(see page 3 for details)

April 24, 5:30pm
Annual Spring Auction at the Lucy Cuddy Hall, UAA
(see details inside)

Our generous sponsors include: **Dorsey & Whitney Foundation**



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Carolyn Mote receives her Jr. Naturalist Badge.

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NEWS & APPRECIATION

The Board of Directors welcomes **Pete Panarese** and **John Cyr** to the board.

Thank you to everyone who made a donation to our Christmas Wish List. Special thanks to the **ALASKA REGIONAL HOSPITAL AUXILIARY** for donating \$2500 toward the purchase of a defibrillator. For many years this has been on our list of needs. Thank you to all the Auxiliary members who have made our wish come true. One day it may save someone's life at the Nature Center.

Thank you to former resident volunteer **Shawn Martin** for making a contribution of \$1300 in memory of Carole and Dick Lloyd. Our naturalists will be able to purchase materials and equipment on their educational wish list.

Special Appreciation to all our 2009 Corporate Donors (listed on front) including new contributions received from:

The Dorsey & Whitney Foundation - \$2900
Thomas, Head & Greisen, CPA - \$1000

A very special note of appreciation to our most generous individual donors over the past years:

\$60,000+
Dick Griffith

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\$5000-\$15,000
Jill Johnson and Bill Barnes
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Barbara and Dan McDonough
Jean and Mark Merrill
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Sarah and Steve Wright



Thanks to our volunteer in residence, **Matt Henschen**, our trails have been impeccably groomed this winter and our firewood well stocked.

Scott Girard

Scott hopes to see lots of envelope-pushing among the kids to whom he teaches astronomy. "There are smart kids out there," he said. "If they can get turned on by science and math and discovery, then that's a future scientist or engineer."

Scott Girard is one of the organizers of the Nature Center's popular Night with the Stars. This year, for the fifth annual event, Scott has arranged for former astronaut Bill Oefelein to meet the group and give a talk.

Dinner and fine wines are by Chef Alex Perez of Haute Quarter Grill, and harpist Beth Baker will entertain during dinner. It all takes place Sunday, March 14, from 5-8 p.m. at the Nature Center. Tickets are \$100, and tables of eight are available. Call 694-2108 for reservations.



5th Annual

Night with the Stars

Sunday, March 14, 2010, 5-8pm
at the
Eagle River Nature Center

Featuring a presentation by Astronaut
William "Bill" Oefelein

Fine wines and dinner by **Chef Alex Perez** of
Haute Quarter Grill

Harpist Beth Baker

\$100/person.
Limited number of seats left. Call soon!
Call 694-2108 for reservations or
contact Laura at admin@ernc.org

2009-10 Griffith Challenge Nears the End

Wow! The Griffith Challenge has reached and exceeded Dick Griffith's match of \$5000 for a total of \$7450 (as of 2/7/10). Thank you so much for your generosity in these challenging times. Don't forget that prior to the 2pm program on February 27, we will draw a name from our donor list. The winner will have the privilege of a private eagle release courtesy of the Bird Treatment and Learning Center. We will notify the lucky person that day.

\$500 + Donors

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Gail and Paul Pelley are our ever-smiling and enthusiastic winter caretakers. As Floridians, they don't get a chance to see much snow, so they're loving every minute of this gorgeous winter. The big question is - will they move to Alaska now?

New and Renewing Members:

Thank you for your support!

Deb Ajango	Dana Dardis	Vida and Stephen Glass	Lynn James	Kyle Meakins
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Bonnie Atwood	Logan DeMarcus	Brian Goodman	Stephen Katzenson	Gregory Mittal
Rosa and Thomas Austin	Anjie and Nick Demma	Meg Goosman	James Keck	Raquel Mixon
Chantal and Todd Balfe	Jeanette Derry	Eric Gooman	Tara Loyd	Bill Moody
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Guenther Bareihis	John Lapkass	Madeline Grant	Lance Ketterling	Susannah Morgan
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David Black	Frank Ebner	Sean Kennedy	John Koltun Family	Mara and Ben Otte
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				David Henry

*(continued
on next
page)*

A Note from the Director

Asta Spurgis

Every year, with great anticipation we wait for that first ray of sun to peak out above the valley summits. This year it's particularly welcoming, because the snowfall has been perfect for cross-country skiing. Our trails have been groomed with regularity to offer some of the best conditions we've had in years.

It's gratifying to see parents teaching their children backcountry skills so that they can relish all of winter's possibilities. From a packed house for volunteer Lilly Goodman's ski clinic to our winter survival, hiking, and tracking classes, our naturalists and volunteers have developed a wide variety of programs. Often, however, I hear that our classes get filled up too quickly. We are asked why we don't allow more people to attend or why we don't offer more of the popular classes.

The answer comes down to two fundamental reasons: quality of the experience and staffing limitations. In

the past, most of our classes did not have limits on the numbers of participants. Year after year, I have seen the demand grow at the expense of the experience. How can one appreciate the words of the naturalist, when one is behind a group of 40 people, 30 feet back along the trail? Or hear the song of a bird with dozens of pairs of feet shuffling along?

It is our goal to add more programs as the interest in them grows. However, to do that, we need the physical space to provide work areas for additional interpreters and more funding to hire them. So for now, until we are able to expand our physical facilities and staffing, I hope you will understand our need to set limits on participation so that the quality of your experience is preserved.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or suggestions (info@ernc.org).

New and Renewing Members

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cesar and Kim Rodgers | Cathy and David Spence | Barry Weiss |
| Thomas and Valarie Royce | Michael Stahl | Matthew and Marcy Werner |
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| David Schlesinger | Gregg Terry | Will Goodwin |
| Ben and Nicole Schneider | Sharon Theroux | Mark and Colleen Wnetrzak |
| David and Dianna Schoderbek | Wallace Thomas | Serena and Kurt Wolery |
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| Julie Shurtleff | Mark VanArsdale | Ben Nilsson |
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| Adam and Sarah Smith | Timothy Vig | Eric and Beate Zink |
| Susie Smith | Bruce Vincent | <i>(As of 10/1/09)</i> |
| Douglas C Smith | Nancy and Brent Voorhees | |
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| Brian Smith | Jason Wall | |
| Cheryl Smith | Tom and Bonnie Wanat | |
| Sherrie Soltis | Robert K Watkins | |
| Ryan Campbell | Cathy Watsjold | |
| Gail Somerville | Monte Weaver | |



Laura Kruger joined the Nature Center in January as our operations manager. Welcome aboard Laura! Please contact Laura at admin@ernc.org if you can volunteer at the front desk or help with our upcoming events.



Friends of Eagle River Nature Center

2010 SPRING AUCTION DONOR FORM

Friends of Eagle River Nature Center was formed in 1996 to operate the Eagle River Nature Center and to provide connections to nature through excellence in education, resource protection and outdoor opportunities. Friends is a not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation. **Tax ID # 92-0156981.** Please retain a copy of this form for your taxes.

Eagle River Nature Center
 32750 Eagle River Rd.
 Eagle River, AK 99577
 907-694-2108 Fax: 694-2119
 www.ernc.org

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I / we _____ would like to be special sponsors of the 2010 Spring Auction. Please contact me/us at _____.

Eagle River Nature Center's 2010 SPRING AUCTION, takes place on Saturday, April 24, 2010 at the Lucy Cuddy Hall on UAA's campus. Doors open at 5:30pm. Silent & live auctions, dinner and music.

EAGLE RIVER NATURE CENTER'S ANNUAL

2010 SPRING AUCTION

Spring Auction
Saturday, April 24
5:30-9pm

Lucy Cuddy Hall
UAA Campus

Dinner with Music by
HOT CLUB OF NUNAKA

Tickets \$40
Tables of 8



Friends of Eagle River Nature Center
32750 Eagle River Road
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Call 694-2108
for reservations.
www.ernc.org



EAGLE RIVER NATURE CENTER
February 2010 Member News
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February-April Hours:

Friday-Sunday, 10am-5pm or by appointment.

May Hours:

Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-5pm

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Just look at the address label above for your expiration date. You can renew online, by phone or by mail.

We're on **FACEBOOK** now!



Eagle River Christmas Bird Count Update

By Liza Sanden and Doris Ivory

This winter marks the 110th year of the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. For this event, tens of thousands of volunteers across North America spend a day recording the numbers and species of birds in a pre-assigned area. The data collected by these citizen scientists allows researchers, conservation biologists and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. Birds are well-known barometers of environmental health. Changes or shifts in their numbers can warn of threats to habitats and natural systems critical to all life on Earth. Like canaries in a coal mine, they can alert us to danger.

On Sunday, December 27, 2009, 28 dedicated volunteers participated in the 30th Eagle River/ Chugiak area Audubon Christmas Bird Count, organized by the Eagle River Nature Center. Temperatures were mild, between 15 to 30 degrees under a partly cloudy sky. A total of 26 species and 2831 birds were observed. The highlights of the count were a Short-eared owl, the first ever, and American Robins, the most ever with 12 birds. Robin numbers in winter have been increasing throughout

the region. Other unusual sightings included a Northern Goshawk and Golden Eagle. Twice as many Black-capped Chickadees were seen this year (502) as were seen in 2008, which had an exceptionally low count. Since 2003, the number of Bald Eagles increased from a couple of dozen to as many as 312 eagles. This year 298 were counted, the 3rd highest year for eagles in Eagle River. Woodpeckers and Pine Grosbeaks were seen in unusually low numbers (the fewest Grosbeaks since 1982, when we only had 9 participants). Another interesting observation was the large number of empty backyard bird feeders for the second year in a row.

At the end of the day, participants gathered at Jitters in Eagle River to share observations and bird count numbers and enjoy a potluck dinner. The numbers recorded will be added to the nationwide Audubon count. We would like to thank everyone who took part in this year's Christmas Bird Count. Their efforts are making a difference in science and bird conservation.

