

## QILAK – TONY SCHELLINCK

Established in 2011, this award is intended to recognize individual Canadian residents, or teams of residents, who have made an outstanding contribution, during a particular time period, either to the public understanding and appreciation of astronomy in Canada, or to informal astronomy education in Canada, and to promote such activities among the members of the sponsoring organizations.

The undersigned hereby submit the following citation to support presenting the RASC Qilak Award to Douglas Anthony (Tony) Schellinck, member of the RASC Halifax Centre, in recognition for his long-standing, diverse, and innovative astronomy outreach activities in Nova Scotia.

Tony Schellinck's education and outreach work is utterly unique and unlike anything else done in Canada. It is remarkably creative, delivered with energy, passion, and humour. Its variety, depth, breadth, scope, and success are astonishing. It meets peoples' interest and curiosity "where they live." Tony engages peoples' hearts and minds at their level, and enables people to engage with the universe immediately, joyously, and personally. Tony brings the Universe to people at ground level—his audiences are expertly and efficiently guided to a key understanding, that the stars, as Helen Sawyer Hogg always said, really do belong to everyone!

Tony joined the RASC Halifax Centre in 2006 and rapidly became an active member. He earned the following observing certificates: Explore the Universe (2017), Explore the Moon—Telescope (2020), Messier (2016), Finest NGC (2020); and all three astroimaging certificates: Wide-Field (2017), Deep-Sky (2017), Solar System (2017). This strong background in observing and imaging the sky, combined with his natural teaching ability (retired professor) allowed Tony to translate his love of astronomy into a series of outreach initiatives to engage others, especially beginners. During that time, he also edited the Centre newsletter, Nova Notes (2015–17) and served on the Centre Board of Directors (most years 2015–present).

To cite the instances of Tony's outreach activities event-by-event would take too long to relate. The evidence below is aggregated by topic, but to give a temporal sense of Tony's activity, here in his own words is a report to the Centre representing a single year (2016):

*On a personal note, I have been quite busy with outreach this year. I have put on nine shows at the Halifax Planetarium, six SCANS classes, two Liverpool Astor Theatre flat-screen planetarium shows with Wayne Mansfield and two similar shows at the Margaret Hennigar Public Library in Bridgewater with Jerry Deveau. I set up my binoculars table for three nights at Keji DSW and two nights at Nova East. I mounted the play The Star Trek Universe: Where Empires Exist at the Halifax Central Library on the fiftieth anniversary of Star Trek, and then again at CaperCon in Sydney. There was also a Breakfast Morning segment associated with these plays. I was guest speaker at a Sunday Assembly held at the Halifax Central Library. Other observing nights—four with SCANS students, Smileys Provincial Park (post Nova East), Privateer Days in Liverpool. I manned the table at HalCon for Sunday afternoon. Perhaps one of the more unusual nights was working with professional photographers from Quebec who were using Keji as a backdrop for a cover photo of a Subaru in the foreground and the Milky Way in the background. All told I gave 36 outreach presentations/shows/sessions this year with audiences ranging from 3 to 85 each time. Many of these shows required days of preparing and coordination to put on. When you add on the number of days required to put out Nova Notes and tend to RASC council matters, not to mention the nights I go out to my observatory in Port Mouton, you begin to get an idea why my spouse is starting to kindly suggest I may be spending too much time on astronomy.*

### **On to the evidence...**

**Disclaimer:** *The following evidence was mined from email chat lists and Nova Notes newsletter accounts and may be incomplete and/or contain minor errors of detail. Tony was not consulted in the preparation of this nomination, but we did use information from his 2018 JRASC article. We also consulted his wife, Heather (in confidence) to confirm some details.*

## **Innovative Outreach Initiatives**

Tony has created several innovative activities for astronomy outreach. These were outlined in his article “RASC Outreach: Endless Opportunities for Creative Engagement with Novice Observers,” published in JRASC February 2018 (pages 18–21).

*Binocular Table*—10 to 25 individuals borrow binoculars from a table set up in a dark-sky observing location and are coached by the session leader on how to use the binoculars. Then they try to find easy-to-find objects on their own. The leader might help guide them to more difficult targets with a strong narrow light beam pointed into the sky. Sessions last about 30-45 minutes and can be repeated. The idea came to Tony when he discovered that he could find 60 of the 110 Messier objects with binoculars. The Binocular Table has been deployed more than 20 times at outreach events.

*Telescope Plaza*—similar to the above, but with a smaller number of 6” or 8” Dobsonian telescopes, with 1–3 people sharing a telescope (introduced in 2019).

*Ace Amateur Astronomer*—participants (especially youngsters) engage in a Binocular Table activity with a 20-object guide sheet appropriate to the month. If they find at least 5 listed objects, they are issued an Ace Amateur Astronomer certificate on the spot. A description is posted on the [RASC website](#) and was presented at the 2022 online RASC General Assembly. Tony has issued up to 40 AAA certificates in one night.

*Flat-Screen Planetarium*—basically a night-sky tour with a twist: fish-eye astrophotos are projected onto a flat screen and participants sit well back from the screen while the presenter points out stars and constellations. With coaching, from the presenter, they look for asterisms, star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies in the projection using supplied binoculars. Photos of various scales are used, ending up with closeups. Weather permitting, these shows are followed by outdoor observing sessions (introduced in 2016).

*Star Trek Play*—In 2015, Tony created, wrote, produced, and acted in the live-action and multi-screen play [The Night Sky According to Star Trek—Where Empires Exist](#). In this play, several characters from the TV series described how to find constellations and deep sky objects on the way to their various empires. The play was presented at Hal-Con, the sci-fi and comic convention in Halifax, Caper-Con in Sydney, and finally at the Central Library in Halifax (2016), on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original Star Trek television series. The play grew out of the earlier presentations *The Secrets of the Universe as Revealed by Star Trek (2012)*, *Everything We Knew About Astronomy We Learned from Star Trek, Where in the Sky is the Klingon Empire*, and *The Night Sky According to Star Trek (2015)*.

### **Halifax Planetarium Shows (2013–2020)**

Tony became one of the several presenters at the planetarium at Dalhousie University, and introduced several innovations. With the addition of a data projector, he projects his own images of deep sky objects onto the dome. He also instructs the audience on how to use binoculars. After the show (if clear), he leads a brief observing session outside with participants, looking for the objects highlighted in the show. In the 8-year interval 2013–2020, Tony presented 48 planetarium shows to 1024 adults and 118 children (over 8 years). The planetarium closed when COVID struck and has not yet re-opened for public shows. Show themes include *Love is in the Stars* (Valentine’s Day), *Journey to the Centre of the Galaxy*, *Begin to Observe*, *The Klingon Empire*, *Using Binoculars and Telescopes*.

### **Flat-Screen Planetarium Shows in Theatres and Lecture Halls (2016–present):**

The flat-screen planetarium shows have been presented at a wealth of venues. The inaugural show was *A Practical Guide to Observing the Night Sky*—Astor Theatre (Liverpool, 2016), and became the core of his SCANS multi-week courses (see below). Other one-night screenings were presented in Shelburne and Yarmouth (2017).

### **Kejimkujik Dark Sky Preserve (2010-present)**

Tony has been a volunteer presenter at 13 of 14 annual Dark-Sky Weekends (DSW) held at Kejimkujik, either as a lecturer, telescope operator, binocular table leader, or telescope plaza operator. His 2011 keynote lecture was *From Here to There, a Personal Journey from Earth to the Farthest Reaches of Space*. His Port Mouton home is close enough to Keji that he has managed to represent RASC Halifax there for several individual outreach events, such as The Dark as Keji beer launch (2017), assisting with photo and video shoots relating to the night

sky (2016), and presenting to visitor groups (2013, 2019, 2022). Tony was part of the RASC team that negotiated the first Partnering Agreement for a DSP between Parks Canada and a RASC Centre, and represented dark sky issues at a Kejimikujik Management Plan Meeting (2019). In recent years, Tony actively assisted in organizing the DSW. Currently, he is Co-Chair of the RASC Halifax DSP Committee and the principal contact with Kejimikujik.

### **Nova East Star Party**

Tony has been a participant in the Nova East star party since he joined RASC. He brought his various outreach activities to the event annually, such as the Binocular Table, the Telescope Plaza, and the Ace Amateur Astronomer. He has also presented talks, such as *Observing the Night Sky with Binoculars* (2016) and *Observing in Nova Scotia—How to Beat the Weather Gods* (2018).

### **Seniors College Association of Nova Scotia (SCANS) (2016–present)**

SCANS is a volunteer run, non-profit organization for members aged 50 and over where instructors teach non-credit academic courses in return for an honorarium. Tony's SCANS courses began in 2016 at the Astor Theatre in Liverpool. The first 6-week course with 37 senior students was *A Practical Guide to Observing the Night Sky Using Binoculars*, in effect an expanded version of the Flat-Screen Planetarium shows. In this course he covered observing through the four seasons, lunar observing, and basic sketching. The course included 3 nighttime viewing sessions. A second course was *Seeing Is Believing—How the Telescope Changed Who We Are and What We Know* (2020). Tony presented SCANS courses in Liverpool (2016), Mahone Bay (2017), Chester (2018), Dartmouth (2018), Truro (2018), Halifax (2020), Dartmouth (2020), and by Zoom (2020)—8 times in all.

### **Instructional Videos**

In 2020 Tony produced 7 instructional videos on observing and telescopes, which have earned 1300+ views on the RASC Halifax YouTube Channel

(see <https://www.youtube.com/c/RASCHalifax>)

How to use Binoculars to Observe the Night Skies (2020)  
A Virtual Field Trip to Observe the November Night Sky  
International Observe the Moon Night, Sept. 26, 2020. How to Observe the Moon  
So You Want to Buy a Telescope: Episode 1—Tripods  
So You Want to Buy a Telescope: Episode 2—The Role of a Mount in a Telescope System  
So You Want to Buy a Telescope: Episode 3—Basic Telescopes  
So You Want to Buy a Telescope: Episode 4—Advanced telescopes and recommendations

### **Miscellaneous Outreach Presentations (incomplete)**

International Observe the Moon Night (Halifax, 2010)  
*Explore the Universe* at Halifax Central Library (2013) and Bridgewater Library (2013),  
Sidewalk observing (Citadel Hill, Halifax, 2013)  
Star Trek play (Nocturne, Halifax, 2015)  
Impromptu presentation (Smileys Provincial Park, 2016)  
*Astronomy on the Cheap* (Sunday Assembly, Halifax, 2016)  
Observing sessions (White Point Beach Resort, 2017, 2018)  
Senior Physicians Group (Halifax, 2017)  
Observing session (Keji Seaside Adjunct, 2017),  
Thrive Youth Group (2018)\Chowder & Chat (Lunenburg, 2019)  
Impromptu presentation (Joshua Tree National Park, 2019)  
Conference and exhibition booth shifts (multiple years at Hal-Con, RV Show, Saltscapes).

### **RASC Education and Public Outreach (EPO) Committee (2020–present)**

From the Chair of the EPO Committee: "Tony has worked on one of our main projects, the RASC Novice Observing Program with Lucas Kuhn, Francesco Ambrogi and the late Linda Pulliah. He has been a great supporter

of using naked eye and binoculars for observing and we support and promote his Ace Amateur Astronomer program. He has helped unwaveringly when we needed something edited or reviewed, works quietly but efficiently, and gets things done. I hope he stays with us as we need his calm demeanour and thoughtfulness on our committee.”

The concept of the novice observing program (still in beta test) is to have a downloadable observing program with sufficient detail so that a non-RASC leader could coach novice observers (of all ages). The observing program is designed to be completed in one evening.

#### **Outreach to Underserved Communities**

In the past, RASC Halifax Centre outreach activities have largely served the population of Halifax Regional Municipality and have under-served rural Nova Scotian communities. As a part-time resident of Port Mouton on the South Shore (2 hours drive from Halifax), Tony is in a good central location to visit other South Shore communities and beyond. Tony takes his talks and courses on multiple occasions to the communities of Chester, Mahone Bay, Lunenburg, Kingsburg, Bridgewater, Liverpool, Barrington, Shelburne, and Yarmouth (1.5 hours from Port Mouton).

#### **Final Words**

The Board of the Halifax Centre enthusiastically support this nomination of Tony Schellinck for the Qilak Award, in recognition and celebration of his national-award-worthy achievements in astronomy education and outreach. We believe the evidence shared above more than qualifies Tony Schellinck for the RASC Qilak Award. We'll let Tony summarize in his own words (from his JRASC article):

*People have a real hunger to learn about what is in the sky and to have the experience of finding deep-sky objects themselves. I have the ability to help them fulfill this need. Outreach provides me with satisfaction, learning, challenges, opportunities for fulfillment, and a way to give back to the communities in which I live.*

Nominated by Dave Chapman, FRASC