

## **AURA Exhibits at the National Indian Education Association Annual Convention**

AURA was an exhibitor at the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Annual Convention in San Diego on October 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>. Attending were over 2000 delegates representing school districts from around the U.S. that primarily enroll American Indians, Native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives. The four day convention featured workshops and cultural events. Workshop topics focused on innovative learning tools and programs, state and federal curriculum requirements, native language revitalization, health and wellness, student retention, scholarships, grant funding and transition to higher education.

The National Indian Education Association is the oldest and largest Indian education organization representing American Indian, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian educators and students. The mission of the NIEA is to “support traditional Native cultures and values, to enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities, to promote Native control of educational institutions, and to improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States.”

AURA’s Action Plan for Broadening Participation recognizes that steps needed to improve the diversity of the future scientific workforce must begin early in a student’s education. This has driven our commitment to develop our grade school and middle school targeted educational outreach programs. AURA’s strong interest in working with the Native American and Native Hawaiian communities falls naturally as a result of the fact that many of our observatories are located on Native Land. Kitt Peak sits on the land of the Tohono O’odham nation. The Gemini Observatory and the future ATST observatory are located on land held sacred by many Native Hawaiians. It was for this reason we believed that our presence at the NIEA Convention was an important opportunity.

The AURA exhibit featured and demonstrated educational outreach activities developed in each of our four operating centers: Gemini, NOAO, NSO and the Space Telescope Science Institute. This event marked the first time that all AURA centers came together to present the breath of our successful public and educational outreach programs. Gemini, represented by Janice Harvey, provided materials about its several initiatives including the Polynesian Voyaging and Wayfinding curricula for use in the StarLab Portable Planetarium. This curricula, developed for use with the Polynesian cylinder, was co-written by the Polynesian Voyaging Society, the Gemini Observatory and Dr. Richard Crowe from the University of Hawaii at Hilo. The Polynesian Voyaging and Wayfinding project is an outstanding example of how science education can be integrated with Native Hawaiian culture.

Representing NOAO was Steve Pompea and Katy Garmany. NOAO presented material about its several educational outreach tools including the Hands-On-Optics, the informal science education tool designed to help youth learn by doing, making discoveries and thinking like scientists. Many conference attendees enjoyed viewing the Galileotelescope, a product developed under the leadership of Steve Pompea. The Galileoscope is telescope assembly kit which is used along with a learning curricula to teach students about optics. Once assembled, the result is telescope of sufficient quality to view the rings of Saturn.

NSO, represented by John Leibacher, offered material about its “Ask Mr. Sunspot” program as well as the NSO Research Experience Opportunities for teachers and college students.

Also featured at the convention was the Hubble Viewspace, the self-updating multimedia astronomy display created by the Public Outreach team at Space Telescope Science Institute. The Viewspace has won acclaim from users, scientists and multimedia producers.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the meeting was the many opportunities we had to engage in meaningful conversations with teachers and educational administrators from tribal schools throughout the nation. This in-depth communication allowed us to better understand the needs of these teachers and schools including the funding constraints and education standards requirements under which they operate. In addition, materials and programs demonstrated by other exhibitors were very helpful in understanding what other tools are available.