



**Lowell Observatory Advisory Board  
Meeting of the Executive Committee  
Wednesday 29 April 2020 at 9:00 a.m.**

**I. Introduction and Virtual Meeting Etiquette**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Michael Beckage. Present via ZOOM were Executive Committee Members: Leo Crowley, Donna Weistrop, Kay Corbin, Tom Ensign, John Giovale, and David Chase. Present via telephone were Pam Ross (Secretary), David Connell (Lowell Observatory Foundation – LOF Chairman), James McCarthy, Robert Ayers and Drew Barringer. Also present via ZOOM: Trustee Lowell Putnam, Trustee Designate Erica Broman, Lisa Actor (Deputy Director for Development – DDD), Stephen Riggs (Development Manager), Anne LaBruzzo (Deputy Director for Administration – DDA), Michael West (Deputy Director for Science - DDS), Samantha Gorney (Deputy Director for Outreach), Danielle Adams (Deputy Director for Marketing and Communications – DDMC), Kyler Kuhlen (Deputy Director for Technology), Joseph Marcus (Putnam Collections Center – PCC Committee Chairman), Stephen Brown (LOF Trustee), and Director Jeffrey Hall (ex-officio). Also present were IT (Scott Do and CJ von Buchwald-Wright) and Mattie Harrington took meeting minutes.

**II. Minutes of January Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting on January 26, 2020 were approved as presented.

**III. Millennium Fund Status and Payout Request**

Michael Beckage reported the balance of the Millennium Fund was \$1,736,999 on March 31. Director Hall made no request for funds to be disbursed at this time.

**IV. Trustee's Comments**

The Trustee thanked Anne LaBruzzo for her work leading to the award of a PPP (Payroll Protection Program) loan to the Observatory of \$1.4 Million. He noted that the Observatory has fared better than other small businesses during this time and should be looking for ways to pay it forward to other small businesses in Flagstaff. The decision on how we proceed with a public program re-opening is being discussed. More information will follow as State and Federal guidance is provided.

## **V. Director's Report**

Director Hall reported that due to COVID-19 concerns the decision was made to temporarily close the on-site visitor programs on March 12, 2020. Strategic planning was put on hold but is now ramping back up. A deciding factor as to whether our strategic plan is on the right track is if it can survive during difficult times. This plan has weathered the storm from a mission standpoint. Lowell Observatory is continuing its mission and has expanded its online presence. The Observatory culture has always been to take care of its staff and is continuing that focus during this time. Additionally, the Director and Trustee are working on a plan to help support the Flagstaff community by purchasing gift cards from local restaurants to be used when operations start back up.

Operations at sites off the Mars Hill campus have been temporarily shut down. This has created a loss of revenue that would have been realized if the LDT (Lowell Discovery Telescope) were operational. We are currently working on a plan to get the telescope back into operation with appropriate cleaning and social distancing protocols in place. NPOI (Navy Precision Optical Interferometer) is a work in progress. The funds awarded for operation have not yet been released, but a plan is in place to operate the facility once it is ready to be used.

## **VI. Deputy Director for Science**

Michael West reported that research is ongoing. Work with students is a bit challenging but proceeding. The astronomers have time now to catch up on the backlog of data that they have collected over the years but didn't have time to reduce. Papers are being published and staff have stepped-up to support the expanded online programming. Astronomers are not traveling, so meetings are being held virtually. The American Astronomical Society has announced it will hold its June 2020 meeting virtually.

## **VII. Marketing and Communications**

Danielle Adams reports that part-time staff appreciate that they are still being paid and employed. Gift shop revenue was above target for March prior to the shutdown. The new ACME Tech system is now functioning, and training will resume once the Observatory is back up and running. A survey prepared by the Development Department was sent out yesterday concerning the online programming and we are looking forward to the responses. We had a successful iHeart Pluto Festival event back in February and we have had 150K visitors to our YouTube channel. The Discovery Channel Telescope is now the Lowell Discovery Telescope. Our engagement with the Discovery Channel is going well and they are fully engaged.

## **VIII. Development**

Lisa Actor reported that the member renewal rate is at an all-time high and annual fund gifts are pouring in, thanks to the Director's letter sent to 1800 of our most loyal supporters in late March. Prior to the shutdown we were above our target and are currently just \$5K down from that target. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> and before the COVID-19 shutdown, we had raised \$400K

toward the Astronomy Discovery Center (ADC). Those dollars will be matched by the Caris Trust's matching challenge gift. Requests for gifts to the ADC have been put on hold for now but Lisa is currently working with Samantha Gorney and Juan Tanus to plan for ADC giving opportunities. The GODO (Giovale Open Deck Observatory) quotation tiles were an excellent way to get people involved and we are looking to do something similar with the ADC.

Barbara Robinson has fully funded the columbarium and construction has begun. Commitments have also been received from individuals who want to have their remains inurned on Mars Hill. The idea of the columbarium was presented by the Robinsons about five years ago and it is now coming to fruition.

We received a \$10K individual gift and a \$67K grant from the Don Nierling Memorial foundation for the GODO Pedway (Pedestrian Walkway). Construction has begun. The handrail and lighting aspects are awaiting additional donations. The total cost for the Pedway is estimated at \$135K.

Don Trantow's generous estate gift will total more than \$1.8 million. Half has been received by the Foundation and the other half will arrive by the end of June.

Development staff are planning to meet with donors via electronic conferences since in-person meetings are not possible at this time. The team is awaiting information on ADC giving opportunities for discussion with those prospective donors.

## **IX. Finance Update**

Anne LaBruzzo reported that HR is encouraging employees to take advantage of the tools available regarding mental health and stress especially during these difficult times.

Lowell Observatory was awarded a PPP loan, which is a federally guaranteed loan to employers who maintain their payroll during the COVID-19 pandemic. The loan award was the result of the tremendous efforts of Tim Dodd and his staff at Alliance Bank. The old Astronomer's Lodge and two of the three acres that were parceled on the Blackett property have been sold.

## **X. Technology**

Kyler Kuehn reported that revised operational policies for the Anderson Mesa 31" and 42" telescopes are in place. All the safety precautions and social distancing can be practiced while using these telescopes. The LDT shutdown began on March 30<sup>th</sup>. New policies are being put in place to have it back in operation by May 7<sup>th</sup>.

Staffing: We went through the interview process for the Head of Instrumentation position and made an offer to a candidate, but the offer was declined. Other positions requiring on-site interviews have been put on hold. Two Telescope Operators will be leaving in the next

few months. We recently hired a new facilities person. IT has a new intern to help with some of the work that needs to be done while they focus on more high-level issues. The job description for Project Manager has been submitted to HR for posting this week.

Discussions regarding a possible back-up imager for LMI are ongoing. NPOI plus-up funding is on the way but has not been received. Work is in progress on a new contract.

## **XI. Outreach**

Samantha Gorney reported that full-time and part-time staff have been keeping busy. Full-time employees are doing training seminars and mentoring part-time staff. Part-time employees are being allowed to work up to the total number of hours they would normally work, and they are handling video editing, etc.

We are currently working on plans for reopening and what that will look like. Our focus is on programs that can be scaled over time and will keep us cognizant of group sizes for social distancing.

LOCKS (Lowell Observatory Camps for Kids) has been cancelled for the summer but we will continue our partnerships with FUSD (Flagstaff Unified School District) and NAU. These teachers/students were used as counselors during the camps. Local teachers will work on developing educational science videos. NAU students will use their expertise with infusing applied math as part of the course work.

The outreach Master plan is moving forward with the walkway for the GODO. It will be on the southwest side of the GODO and include a handrail and lighting.

## **XII. Putnam Collection Center (PCC)**

Joseph Marcus reports that Lauren Amundson has finished work putting Wes Lockwood's research online. Lauren has also been training one educator and one retail staff person in the archives. A spring intern has compiled information on the works of EC and VM Slipher. Scanning and freezer work has been halted for now due to the shutdown.

Stacey Christen and Lauren are working on policies and gathering documents for research. Lauren and Kevin Schindler wrote a short article on the Slipher-Hubble correspondence which is to appear in the May issue of the American Astronomical Society's History of Astronomy Division (HAD) Newsletter. Joe described highlights and distributed a link to the correspondence to the Advisory Board in March, and will work with Lauren and Kevin on a press release.

Discussions are proceeding on seeking outside funding to scan and tabulate the 16 Lampland radiometry logbooks and archive them in a repository that would be available to the astronomical community.

**XIII. Membership Committee**

Donna Weistrop reported that the purpose of the Membership Committee is to recruit potential new Advisory Board members from diverse backgrounds.

Several prospects were referred by Deidre Hunter and they were scheduled to visit the Advisory Board meeting in June. The idea of adding a diversity statement to the Advisory Board Bylaws was discussed. Proposed diversity statements were reviewed. Advisory Board membership is currently comprised of 24% women.

**XIV. Lowell Observatory Foundation**

David Connell reported that the Lowell Observatory Foundation (LOF) made a report in January regarding Don Trantow's estate. It has been decided that his estate gift will be added to a reserve fund, which is the best possible way to respect Mr. Trantow's wishes.

There are two Trustees whose terms expire this year: David Connell, Chair of the Foundation Board, and John Radway. David Connell will not seek to be re-elected to the LOF Board at the end of his term. David is not aware of John's wishes at this time. The Executive Committee will be asked to nominate potential Trustees for the LOF prior to the annual meeting.

George Putnam has been put forward as a potential new Trustee of the LOF Board and David will provide his bio prior to the June meeting for everyone to review.

**XV. Future Meeting Calendar, Other Business**

Next Executive Committee meeting will be held on June 25, 2020. The Advisory Board Meeting date and time will be provided once a decision is made whether to hold the meeting virtually.

The meeting was adjourned.