



## International Dark-Sky Association

*"... to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies"*

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### New Ohio Park Commended for Protecting the Nighttime Environment by International Dark-Sky Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TUCSON, AZ - An overcast sky in Geauga County, Ohio did not dampen the enthusiasm of the 1,500 people attending Observatory Park's dedication on 20 August, when it announced its full status as an International Dark Sky Park (IDSPark). The new park is the latest member of the growing IDSPlaces program, the flagship of the International Dark-Sky Association's ongoing efforts to promote stewardship of the night sky.

The idea for Observatory Park began with the donation of a 25" telescope and a small parcel of land. Several years later, the park acquired nationally recognized Nassau Observatory and the land adjacent to it. Ironically, Nassau Observatory was moved from Cleveland to Geauga County in 1957 due to increasing light pollution, but has not been used since the early 1990s. The finished park, with an observatory, two telescopes, and permanent astronomy-themed exhibits on a 1,034-acre preserve in Monteville Township, provides an exciting link to the history of astronomy in Ohio while creating resources for the future. Refurbishment of Nassau is anticipated.

In 2008, the park earned provisional dark sky status during construction for its ambitious plans for lighting, education, and conservation. Observatory Park is the first park of the Geauga Park District to apply for full International Dark Sky Park status and the first park ever to receive provisional status. It is the eighth International Dark Sky Park in the world, and one of just over a dozen to earn the prestigious IDSPlace distinction. GPD has a mission of protecting wildlife habitat, including unspoiled forests and wetlands. The IDA commends park officials for recognizing that preservation of the nighttime environment is an essential ingredient for the protection of natural spaces.

Science professionals from numerous universities, the Great Lakes Science center and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History collaborated with local astronomy organizations and school districts for Observatory Park's programs and design. Astronomy-inspired interactive sculptures adorn the site. A seismograph and weather station displays live feeds of local atmospheric conditions, and five telescope pads with electrical outlets invite stargazing.

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The telescope in the central plaza will be open for public events including star parties, celestial occurrences, and collaborations with local groups and non-profit organizations.

All park lighting is fully shielded and task specific. Terry McGowan, lighting designer and member of the IDA Board of Directors, adds "The lighting was not only designed to be dark sky friendly and efficient; it was designed to be a prototype of what outdoor lighting can now do to reduce existing sky glow without compromising safety and function." LED fixtures in the public event center and parking lot have source controls to adjust automatically, dimming during a full moon. More than two-dozen pine trees border the parking lot to shield stargazers from incoming headlights. Facilities also utilize living roofs, solar panels, and waterless sanitation.

The entire park is funded by philanthropic dollars. Observatory Park admirably leveraged their provisional status to garner publicity, funding, and programming. An innovative "lighting naming right" was presented to donors to fund the desired fixtures.

Park promoters lead the community in dark sky preservation efforts. During construction, exhibits throughout northeast Ohio in 2009 reached an estimated combined audience of 22,000. Geauga Park District management is attempting to retrofit all of the lights in its many parks to conform to IDSPark guidelines and GPD staffers are working with Monteville Township to encourage passage of a lighting ordinance. GPD Executive Director Tom Curtin proposed the idea of a county-wide Dark Sky Reserve to county commissioners in December 2008.

Observatory Park is also a host site of one of the first IDA Night Sky Brightness Monitors. These Internet linked, solar-powered devices were developed to collect data on sky quality at astronomical sites. The monitor, developed in part by the International Dark-Sky Association through a grant from the National Science Foundation, provides unprecedented educational opportunities, many administered locally by Observatory Park. Data from the SkyMonitor will allow park managers to make long-term measurements of the brightness of the sky over the park to ensure its continued protection.

As a host to a SkyMonitor, two telescopes, and numerous interpretative displays, Observatory Park provides rare educational opportunities that will change the outlook of night sky conservation in the region. IDA executive director Bob Parks remarks, "The park's exceptional lighting plan represents the pinnacle of thoughtful design and embodies the ideals of conservation that are apparent throughout the park's facilities. IDA wholeheartedly commends the visionaries behind Observatory Park for their superb execution of a cutting-edge lighting design and persistent public outreach."