

Grand Opening of New Observatory

Robert & Lillis Kingman Observatory open to the public Sep 30

[Campus News](#) | Posted on September 22, 2016



ROBERT & LILLIS
KINGMAN
OBSERVATORY

By: Danni Francis

Friday, September 30 at 7 p.m. marks the grand opening at the new observatory for the [Department of Physics](#). Located above the Pathfinder building on the north side of campus, the observatory will be named the Robert & Lillis Kingman Observatory. This event is part of the calendar of events for [Alumni Homecoming weekend](#), September 29-Oct. 2.

On June 1, 2016, the structure underwent construction as the old observatory dome was removed as part of the building's demolition. This observatory replacement project is funded by an anonymous donation, supplemented by a previous donation by the physics faculty.

The original dome was donated to Andrews University in 1957 by the Ross family. The family also donated the telescope for the observatory, whose original location was in front of Meier Hall, a men's residence hall.

Under Bruce Zimmerman, the chair of the Department of Physics at the time, the dome moved to its present location above the Pathfinder Building in 1969. It was mounted on a slab and block wall base built by student volunteers under the enthusiastic leadership of physics major Pete Black.

“The observatory served the needs of the astronomy class in the Department of Physics for 45 years,” says [Kelly Youngberg](#), physics administrative assistant, “until it became clear that it needed replacement and plans were drawn up for this new structure.”

The telescope will not be replaced for the new observatory since the 14" [Celestron](#) telescope in current use is in good condition. The new dome was manufactured by [Ash-Dome](#), measuring 16.5 feet in diameter and is fully automated while the former dome was 12 feet in diameter and was manually operated.

Youngberg is a key player in coordinating the physics faculty who comprise the Observatory Committee, which includes [Mickey Kutzner](#), professor of physics, [Stephen Thorman](#), professor of physics and [Robert Kingman](#), emeritus professor of physics. Paul Elder, director of facilities management and [Martin Smith](#), assistant professor of architecture, were also heavily involved in the process.

Youngberg is active as a sponsor of the Astronomy Club and is a member of the [Michiana Astronomical Society](#). She is teaching a one-credit lab (three hours per week on Wednesday) in observational astronomy this semester, a hands-on lab session that allows students to spend as much time at the observatory as possible. The class provides practical experience and background in observational astronomy with modern optical instruments in laboratory, field or remote facilities. Observational Astronomy is a standalone laboratory course suitable for students in any major as well as for the general public.

“Astronomy, like any other hobby—bird watching or Pokémon GO, for example—is about being aware of what is around us,” says Youngberg. “The lab gives students a few hours a week to stop and pay attention to our universe.”

Weather permitting; the observatory will be open to the public for stargazing during the grand opening.

Kingman joined the faculty in 1971. Prior to his arrival at Andrews, he taught at the [University of Arizona](#) (Tucson) and [Walla Walla University](#) (College Place, Washington). Kingman and his wife, Lillis, have two sons and two daughters.

For additional information on the observatory, including directions and a calendar of events, visit observatory.andrews.edu.

Related Links

- [Department of Physics](#)
- [Robert & Lillis Kingman Observatory](#) (includes map of location on campus)
- [List of astronomy classes at Andrews](#)
- [Alumni Homecoming Weekend full schedule](#)

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