

DRAO and ORIC big winners at the Silicon Vineyard Innovation awards

The National Research Council's Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory (NRC/DRAO) and the Okanagan Research and Innovation Centre (ORIC) received recognition for outstanding contribution and commitment to the science and technology community at the 2008 Silicon Vineyard Innovation Awards, an annual Okanagan Science and Technology Council (OSTEC) event.

Astronomer Tom Landecker accepted the Science and Technology Community Leadership Award on behalf of DRAO. This award recognizes the many outreach activities and events at DRAO since it was established in the White Lake Basin south of Penticton in 1959.

Included in a rather long list of educational activities, are tours for school groups, an Astronomy and Engineering for Kids program during spring break, participation in college and university career days and co-op student training programs, an annual lecture series in partnership with the Continuing Studies Department of Okanagan College, and lectures to community groups such as the Royal Astronomical Society of Kelowna and Penticton Rotary Clubs.

Each September DRAO hosts an open house attended by over 1,000 people with activities for all ages. The observatory hosts two events of the popular Meadowlark Festival organized by the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA). DRAO's Ken Tapping contributes a weekly astronomy column to local newspapers, is a regular visitor to Penticton radio stations and has become a household name in the South Okanagan.

In addition, DRAO staff members participate in the governance of community organizations, city councils, school and college boards and the Okanagan Partnership. Gary Hovey, systems engineer and leader of the engineering and technology group at DRAO was a founder and past President of OSTEC. DRAO software engineer, Sonja Vrcic is a current member of the OSTEC Board.

Through the NRC Industry Partnership Program, DRAO is home to ORIC, the recipient of the 2008 OSTEC Member of the Year Award which recognizes outstanding commitment to OSTEC via innovation, support, involvement and volunteer activities. Accepting this award was Peter Haubrich, President and founder of ORIC. The research and innovation center is the only fully-fledged business incubator in the Okanagan. Since its inception in 2005, ORIC has enjoyed steady growth and currently

employs four full-time engineers and one administrator. A new centre is under development in Kelowna.

The DRAO Visitors' Centre at the observatory is open to the public dur-

ing regular business hours, Monday to Friday with a tour guide on-site during weekends from Easter to Thanksgiving.

- Contributed