

Star Parties For Individuals Who Are Legally Blind

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is legally blind?**

If your vision acuity with correction is 20/200 or worse; or if your peripheral field is limited to a diameter of 20 degrees or less you are considered legally blind.

- **How can a person who is legally blind see through a telescope?**

The secret is the light gathering power of the telescope. Millions of individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision. In order to see and enjoy the universe these individuals need the proper optics. Amateur astronomers have the optics needed, telescopes

- **Do you need special telescopes to provide star parties for individuals that are legally blind?**

No, almost any telescope from 60 mm on up will work. Refractors, Newtonians, or Schmidt Cassegrains are fine.

- **Are there only certain astronomical objects which observers who are legally blind can see?**

Yes and no. Through a telescope, those who are able to detect light, are able to explore the moon, make out Jupiter and some of its moons, and be startled by Saturn's rings. To see deep sky objects these observer need extra equipment.

- **Through telescope persons with normal vision see deep sky objects as "faint fuzzies." How can persons who are legally blind see these deep sky objects that are so faint?**

The same was as a sighted person, with vision enhancing equipment. By projecting digital or video images of deep sky objects from a telescope to a TV monitor, you will find the results to be stunning.

- **By transmitting real time images of deep sky objects, from a telescope to a TV, what will a person who is legally blind, but can still detect light expect to see?**

Recently a person with vision so impacted, that she could not read print on paper, was able to see and describe the dust lanes of the Sombrero galaxy. This observer was using an 8 inch SCT telescope connected with an astro video camera which was transmitting to a 12 inch black and white TV monitor. This observation took place in a city environment.

- **Are there any additional benefits for a person who is legally blind in using digital or video transmissions to a monitor when observing the universe?**

Yes, the observer is much more comfortable. Some persons who are legally blind will find it very difficult to use an eyepiece. Additionally the observer is in total control of the brightness and contrast functions found on the monitor allowing him to adjust the image being observed to suit his vision acuity.

- **So what is best for Individuals who are legally blind? Observing through a telescope or observing telescope images transmitted on a TV monitor?**

The connection one gets to the universe when observing through a telescope cannot be duplicated by observing on a TV monitor. Solar system objects are best observed through an eyepiece on a telescope. Deep sky objects are best observed as electronic images transmitted to a TV monitor. Both systems should be available at your star party.

- **How about totally blind individuals, should they be discouraged from attending a star party?**

Absolutely not, although totally blind individuals cannot perceive light or movement, through hearing these individuals are able to create mental images of the objects being talked about at the telescopes. All our telescope operators are encouraged to use words rich in imagery when talking about astronomical objects.

Are there certain age individuals who will benefit from a star party for individuals who are blind?

Since 2004 Project Bright Sky has been conducting free star parties for individuals who are blind who ranged in ages from 6 – 80 years of age.

Contact Project Bright Sky for more information on how you can take part in this unique form of astronomy outreach. fbusutil2002@yahoo.com