



**Custer Institute and Observatory**      [www.CusterObservatory.org](http://www.CusterObservatory.org)  
1115 Main Bayview Road (just South of Route 25), P.O. Box 1204, Southold, New York 11971; 631-765-2626

Custer is a 501(c)(3) educational non-profit (est. 1927) that operates exclusively on public support and is staffed by volunteers.

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **THE BIGGEST TELESCOPE IN A LONG ISLAND OBSERVATORY (Bigger is Better at the Custer Institute)**

On Saturday, May 16 at 9:00 PM (raindate Tuesday, May 19 at 9:00 PM), the Custer Institute in Southold, New York will unveil the biggest telescope in use by a public observatory on Long Island. Not only is the scope the biggest, it also has revolutionary new optics designed and manufactured by members of Custer's Observatory Staff. The telescope, nicknamed the "Dobasaurus," will be housed in the observatory's third floor, 22' dome.

On October 16, 2008, this 25" f/5 (125" 3175mm focal length) [Obsession](#), a Newtonian-style reflecting telescope with a Dobsonian mount, was delivered to Custer from its former home at Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) in Riverhead. The telescope, nearly 11' tall, is the largest one in any public observatory on Long Island. It is also the only Dobsonian telescope in the area that has risen to such heights: because of their size and the need for tall ladders to view through their eyepieces, such telescopes usually remain on the ground; but, because of revolutionary new optics designed by members of Custer's Observatory Staff, the eyepiece has been brought down to standing level. Since October, the staff have been working hard on the optics, as well as on retrofitting the telescope with automated tracking and other advanced features. In May, the work was completed. Now the Custer Institute is ready to make the scope accessible for public viewing during its weekly Saturday night observing sessions.

Ted Koukounas, a member of Custer's Research Team and Chair of Science and Mathematics at SCCC, made the arrangements for the college to loan the telescope to Custer. Since the nearly-new telescope was only rarely used by the college, Prof. Koukounas thought that both the scope and Custer would benefit from the relocation. And he was so very right! Within days of its arrival, the scope's mirror was freed from years of classroom chalk dust and collimated. The Observatory Staff immediately set it up and soon there were shouts of "You can see color in the Orion Nebula!" coming out of the darkness on Main Bayview Road. On October 22nd, contractor Steven Born volunteered himself and his crew to hoist the "Dob-a-saurus" up to the dome via a cherry picker. And in December, volunteers from Custer and from the [Astronomical Society of Long Island](#) (ASLI president and Board member, Mal Speer and John Vogt) began to "retrofit" the scope with a ServoCAT (partly donated by the manufacturer, Gary Meyers, of [StellarCAT](#)) and Argo Navis (on loan from Custerite David Cohn); this will provide automated tracking, go-to capability, and allow for computerized operation.

Observatory-Research Director, Dr. Jeffrey Owen Katz, and Senior Observatory Staff Member, Justine Haupt, have designed revolutionary new optics that will allow for observing from standing level (versus perched upon a tall ladder, as is usually necessary when looking through the eyepiece of a large Dobsonian). Ordinarily the eyepiece height at the zenith of this telescope is 10' but, because of the new optics design, observers can look through the eyepiece by just standing on the ground or, at worst, on the first or second step of an ordinary step ladder. Katz and Haupt call their new optical design the "[Terra-Vue™](#)" and are in the process of obtaining a patent. Custer is grateful to member Tony Pirera (president of [SpectrumThinFilms](#)) for donating the high-grade secondary mirror needed for the new optical design.

The telescope will be housed in Custer's third floor, 22' domed observatory and available for viewing by the

public. At other times, the telescope will be used for research and educational programs such as the Institute's "Education Through Research" project, and for studies and workshops held by Suffolk Community College students and instructors.

Custer's Observatory and Research Director, Dr. Jeffrey Owen Katz, said "We are privileged to have been given the opportunity to have a telescope of this size and quality for use by our Institute. Not only will our members, students and researchers benefit by its presence, but we are pleased that we can share it with the general public who will be able to see in unprecedented detail amazing sites in the universe around us. It is truly inspiring."

So join us as we celebrate not only being the oldest public observatory on Long Island (est. 1927), but the one with the biggest telescope as well!

In addition to those mentioned above, we'd like to thank the following people for their help with this exciting project: Bill Crispino, Donna L. McCormick, David Van Popering.

The basic telescope retails for around \$13,500. The cost of retrofitting it for automated tracking, goto capability, and other features was an additional \$3,000. Add to that the revolutionary new optics and the value of the scope: priceless.

Photos available upon request.

The Custer Institute Inc. (est. 1927) is a NYS 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit that operates on public support and is staffed by volunteers. It is the home of Long Island's oldest public observatory, and also hosts the observatories of Long Island's two oldest astronomy clubs: the Amateur Observers Society and the Astronomical Society of Long Island. The Institute offers a wide range of programs: from in-house lectures, classes, and "how to" workshops, to an annual astronomy conference (est. 1978), to concerts and art exhibits. The "Education Through Research" program gives students the opportunity to work alongside scientists engaged in research at the Institute, thus providing them with hands-on training in scientific methodology. Students also find assistance in the design and execution of their own research, which they may then present at the Institute's annual astronomy conference. Thanks to its research and educational programs, the Institute itself has been honored to have been the recipient of a number of awards, including: David and Wendee Levy's National Sharing the Sky Foundation 2007 award of a 14" Meade telescope, runner-up in Astronomy Magazine's 2007 "Out of this World" competition for excellence in educational outreach, the award of a small grant for research equipment from the Fund for Astrophysical Research, and the award of a 2008 Brookhaven National Laboratory "Breakthrough Mini-Grant." The open membership (300 and growing) consists of amateurs, professionals, students, educators, and supportive members of the community.

**CONTACT:** Donna L. McCormick, President

[CusterDonna@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterDonna@yahoo.com)

**631-765-2626**