

Horseshoe Bay to Host Community Stargazing Party: International Dark Sky Community Invites Locals to Explore Autumn's Celestial Wonders

The City of Horseshoe Bay is hosting a community Stargazing Party **tonight, Thursday, October 16, at 7 p.m.** at the Horseshoe Bay Nature Park (1514 Golden Nugget). The free event celebrates the city's prestigious designation as an International Dark Sky Community, a recognition awarded by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDSA) on November 1, 2015, for exemplary efforts to preserve naturally dark night-time conditions.

As autumn arrives in the Hill Country, the night sky undergoes a spectacular transformation. Summer constellations like the Summer Triangle—formed by Aquila, Cygnus, and Lyra—along with Sagittarius and the galactic center, gradually set in the west. Meanwhile, autumn constellations including Pegasus, Andromeda, Perseus, Cassiopeia, Cetus, and Triangulum rise in the east to dominate the seasonal sky.

Fall brings a welcome drop in humidity and drier air, with less haze and cloud cover. These clearer, darker skies create the ideal environment for a peaceful evening of stargazing.

The event features the Hill Country Astronomers (HCA), a local amateur astronomy organization, who will provide powerful telescopes for attendees to view celestial objects. City staff will also be on hand to assist participants and share information about Horseshoe Bay's commitment to preserving dark skies.

Attendees are encouraged to bring chairs and friends, and may also bring binoculars, telescopes, or night photography cameras. While October weather remains warm during the day, evenings begin to cool, so blankets or jackets are recommended.

The family-friendly event aims to inspire young astronomers, scientists, and space enthusiasts. This activity may help scouts work toward astronomy-related merit badges and home-schooled students with science projects.

"Whether you're an amateur astronomer or simply someone who appreciates the beauty of the night sky, experiencing celestial spaces through a telescope is unlike anything else," organizers noted. "It's a cosmic journey with neighbors and new friends—an adventure that will stay with you for a lifetime."

HCA, founded in August 2011, welcomes anyone interested in astronomy, regardless of equipment or experience level. The organization has members from across Central Texas who share a common goal of learning more about the night sky.

The event is free, and no RSVP is required. Learn more at www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov/stargazing. To learn about HCA, visit www.hillcountryastronomers.com.

Protecting Horseshoe Bay Dark Skies

In the serene, gentle glow of the Hill Country, one only needs to step outside and look up to embrace the breathtaking beauty on a clear and starry evening. The following outdoor lighting tips can enhance your stargazing experience on any night of the year.

1. Use fully shielded lighting

Fully shielded lighting has a barrier at both the top of the fixture and surrounding the light bulb or LED light source. It is set at an angle so the light source cannot be seen by people nearby or wildlife and prevents light trespass onto your neighbors' property, glare, and skyglow. To learn more about fully shielded options, visit www.skykeepers.org/handouts/blbn.pdf.

2. Use the correct color temperature

"Color temperature" describes the apparent color of light emitted from a light source. It is measured in degrees Kelvin (K) on a scale from 1,000 to 10,000. Lower color temperature light (2,000K to 3,000K) has less blue light in its spectrum and is referred to as "warm." Higher color temperature light (3,100K to 6,500K) is rich in blue light and appears harsher and brighter. Blue light can also harm our health and endanger wildlife.

It is critical to use light on the "warm" end of the spectrum. The IDSA recommends using lighting that has a color temperature of no more than 3,000K—the lower the better! In Horseshoe Bay, yard address lights may not contain lamps exceeding 1,800 initial lumens and a correlated color temperature of 3200K.

3. Ensure lights are no brighter than necessary

Good outdoor lighting has a specific purpose, such as illuminating a path, doorway, or gate. It is important that the light is not brighter than necessary to serve that function. Over-lighting creates more skyglow and glare, while also diminishing our ability to see at night. In most cases, less is more!

4. Ensure lights are only on when needed

Using light when not needed is wasteful and could create intrusion into neighboring properties. There are also huge economic consequences! If you are actively using outdoor lights that remain on overnight, you are paying for it! Night-time lighting should be used only when needed and still keep you safe in the dark. Motion sensor lighting could be a more economical and neighbor-friendly option.

Learn more about light pollution and simple solutions to mitigate it from the Hill Country Alliance (www.hillcountryalliance.org/NightSkyLighting) and the IDSA (www.darksky.org).