New Telescope Installed at Stull Observatory; sophisticated instrumentation will expand range of astronomy classes
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A boom forklift is used to lift the mounting component of a telescope installed at Stull Observatory

The heavy-lifting stage of a significant advance in Alfred University's astronomy curriculum blasted off Thursday morning, as the two principal components of a 500-pound telescope system were hoisted into the Olson dome at the University's Stull Observatory complex.

The new 24-inch reflecting telescope will replace a 16-inch reflecting telescope that was built and installed more than 15 years ago by the late Alfred University Professor John Stull. The larger mirror in the new telescope will reflect sharper images, and a spectrometer that later will be installed will significantly expand the range of laboratory work astronomy students can undertake.

Professor of Physics David Toot oversaw the installation of the new system, whose separate base and telescope components were raised from the ground and lowered gently through the dome opening by an Alfred crew headed by Tim Heckman, project manager for facilities/capital projects for Alfred University Physical Plant and staffed by a team from Universal Builders.

Professor of Physics and Astronomy David DeGraff said the new telescope would provide sharper imaging for students' laboratory work, as well as more sophisticated instrumentation for analyzing components of space matter, including nebulas and stars. "Seeing those details for ourselves through experiments and lab practice will be pretty cool," DeGraff said.

Toot noted the University's acquisition of the telescope was the result of a longstanding relationship with computer engineer and philanthropist Wayne Rosing, who joined Google LLC in its infancy and served as vice president for engineering for the company. Now retired, Rosing is the founder of Las Cumbres Observatory Global Telescope Network, but continues his relationship with Alfred University.

Rosing in the 1990's built the computer and wrote accompanying code that operates the University's largest, 32-inch telescope, Toot said. "He's still the only person who really understands that instrument."

Alfred University currently operates and maintains seven telescopes at the Stull Observatory. The instruments are used not only by undergraduates at the University, but high school students who visit the University for the astronomy

summer camp program.

“The Stull Observatory is an extraordinary resource,” Toot said, “and it continues to grow and improve in terms of its educational value.