



Gemini Observatory Press Release:

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Local Dignitaries Launch Gemini's *Viaje al Universo* Week

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Today, Gemini Observatory kicked off its week-long program *Viaje al Universo* with an opening ceremony at the University of La Serena. The annual program is an immersive week of fun, hands-on learning focusing on local students and teachers.

Gemini's invited international guests also joined in the celebration, highlighting their program: *The Big Van "Science on Wheels."* "We are thrilled to be able to engage local students and make them laugh, and even though they might not know it, learn science!", said Alberto Vivó of the three members of the *Big Van* troupe. More information about this group can be found at: <http://www.thebigvantheory.com>)

The University of La Serena's Deputy Director Jorge Catalán Ahumada emphasized the long-standing ties with Gemini in Chile, highlighting the importance of having a local Physics and Astronomy Department.

"Gemini is thrilled that we have many new partners in our effort this year," said Gemini Deputy Director Nancy Levenson. "It is indeed a sign that we are having an impact when our community steps up to participate actively in our work."

Gemini astronomer Erich Wenderoth, who is a regular visitor to local classrooms, adds that his experiences in area classrooms inspires him. "I find sharing what I do with local students so energizing. I look forward to someday when a young astronomer approaches me and reminds me of a talk I gave to their classroom in La Serena!" For the rest of this week classroom programs led by observatory engineers, scientists, and The Big Van troupe are scheduled in many area schools. These visits feature presentations and hands-on activities by staff from the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA) observatories in Chile (Gemini, Cerro Tololo), Las Campanas, the Giant Magellan Telescope (GMT), The Office for the Protection of the Northern Sky Of Chile (OPCC), and the University of La Serena. In addition the week's activities include StarLab portable planetarium programs, family activities, and educational workshops.

Along with schools visits, a special, limited engagement of the Big Van troupe at the Lighthouse CoffeeShop (Matta #570 La Serena) on Tuesday October 20th is planned for the public although tickets are completely sold out to attend the "Café ConCiencia" performance. Nevertheless, a public presentation by The Big Van at St. Mary's School –

El Milagro on Wednesday October 21st (registration at the school), a discussion panel of observatory professional and technical careers at Colegio San Joaquín on October 22nd and a workshop for the Department of Tourism of the Municipality of La Serena called “How to Communicate Effectively about Astronomy” scheduled for Friday 23rd are some of the activities that will happen outside schools.

Participating dignitaries included: La Serena’s Mayor representative, City Council Member Robinson Hernández; Gemini Deputy Director Nancy Levenson; University of La Serena’s representative Jorge Ahumada Catalán, and local officials who joined teachers along with other community leaders who participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

See program details here: www.gemini.edu