

Gemini Observatory Press Release:

Astronomers Wow Local Students

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A week of fun, learning, and even humor highlight Gemini Observatory's 5th annual *Viaje al Universo* which "blasted" into local area classrooms. "This was an exceptional year," said program manager Ma. Antonieta García. "Of course exploration and learning with observatory scientists are always at the heart of this program, but this year included a high dosage of humor." The laughs came from three special guests visiting from Spain called the Big Van: "Scientists Over Wheels."

"Just the tone in your voice can trigger a student's curiosity," said Irene Puerto, one of the three members of the visiting Big Van troupe. "Sharing laughs while learning is priceless!" added Javier Santaolalla. Puerto, Santaolalla, and Alberto Vivó, the three visiting Big Van entertainers produced many smiles in their visits to local classrooms. "However, the core of the annual *Viaje al Universo* program are the scientists from local observatories who share their work with students and inspire the next generation of scientists and explorers," adds García.

Rebeca López, who teaches at Carlos Condell de la Haza School, shares her impressions, "Obviously, bringing science to the classroom is great, but presenting it in such a playful way is so much fun." Participating students also shared memorable moments from the program, like 4th grade students from Colegio San Nicolás, "Learning the phases of the moon using and eating cookies is delicious!"

Each year, astronomers and staff from observatories and universities in La Serena develop classroom presentations for *Viaje al Universo* that encourage student interactions. "Our goal is to teach by doing, touching and feeling what is normally found in books," says astronomer Amelia Ramírez from the University of La Serena. "To have scientists who observe our Chilean skies and present their work to our students, along with all of the other activities, is a dream for our school," said Wilson González Sulantay Principal of San Martín de Porres School.

The program concludes this afternoon Friday October 23rd, when staff from the City Hall's Department of Tourism participate in training by the Big Van scientists on how to effectively communicate science to the public.

Following the excitement of this week's activities, during mid November, Gemini is hosting five students and one teacher from each of the participating schools as special guests at the Gemini South telescope facility on Cerro Pachón in Vicuña. While this behind-the-scenes glimpse of a working observatory closes the program for 2015 García adds that students should, "Expect even more surprises and fun next year!"

See more details on the *Viaje al Universo* program here : <http://www.gemini.edu/viaje>