

The ESO Solidarity Group in Support of the Earthquake Victims

The ESO Solidarity Group*¹

¹ ESO

In the early morning of 27 February 2010, a devastating earthquake followed by a tsunami hit the central part of Chile. Immediate action initiated spontaneously by GEMINI and ESO employees, which was supported by the Solidarity Group, allowed around 500 kg of emergency supplies to be brought to the victims living in the countryside between Cauquenes and Pelluhue. The first-aid items were delivered on 2 March, before government help had reached these remote areas. This prompt action created the initial momentum for a series of concrete actions led by the Solidarity Group to further assist the earthquake victims. These acts of charity could be carried out thanks to the generosity of many ESO employees both in Europe and Chile who promptly answered the call for donations.

Based on requests from local communities and through on-site visits, a number of small projects were proposed. Due to limited resources, a selection was made to retain the cases where our support would be the most useful and efficient (depending on project size, condition of the potential beneficiaries, geographical

location and amount of help already received).

The main actions carried out so far have been:

- Construction of three wooden houses of area 25 m² in the village of Pichidegua (Rancagua area). This work, funded at the 50 % level by the ESO Solidarity Group, was completed by 5 April.
- Insulation of three wooden houses in the vicinity of Coinco village (Rancagua area) on the weekend of 10–11 April. In addition, 250 m² of roofing tiles to cover 20 emergency houses were bought and handed over to the administration of the Coinco Municipality.
- Construction of six wooden houses of area 30 m² in the village of Cumpeo (Talca area). This work is entirely funded by the Solidarity Group and is mainly executed by ESO volunteers. Work is currently ongoing.

A mosaic of photographs from these projects is shown on the News section page (p. 52). Other actions are planned and will be implemented as time and resources allow.

We would like to thank the ESO employees who made these actions possible through their donations and/or active participation as volunteers.

The ESO Solidarity Group

In January 2008, inspired by the Garching Charity Group, eight ESO volunteers created the Solidarity Group in

Chile with the mission of providing support, mainly to ESO community members (employees and contractors) in emergency situations and in fund-raising for general charity work (such as donations to schools, old people's homes, non-profit organisations and handicapped individuals). By December 2009, the Solidarity Group had provided help to a contractor rebuilding her home lost in a fire, a contractor whose wife suffers from a severe illness that had to be treated with expensive medicine and an ESO staff member recovering from a heart transplant. Donations included an old, but operative, written-off science laptop to a paraplegic girl; written-off bed clothes and towels from the ESO Guest-house to an old people's home; a wheelchair to a disabled ESO staff member; two fully filled trucks with obsolete written-off computer items to a state technical high school teaching youngsters to build and repair computers; two fully operative sets of written-off computers and printers to a primary school in Bahia Murta (an isolated distant southern Chilean village); and partial coverage of funding for specific medical treatments at the request of contractors. Since February 2010, all funds collected specifically to support the 27 February earthquake victims have been handled separately and exclusively directed to persons not belonging to the ESO community.

More information on the ESO Solidarity group can be found at <http://www.eso.org/intra/activities/charity/chile.html>.

* The ESO Solidarity Group is composed of: Alejandra Emmerich (President), Maria Madrazo (Treasurer), Paulina Jiron (Secretary), Cecilia Ceron, Philippe Gitton, Agustin Macchino, Gianni Marconi, Francisco Olivares, Claudio Saguez, Linda Schmidtbreich

ESO Participates in Germany's Girls' Day Activities

Douglas Pierce-Price¹

¹ ESO

On 22 April 2010, ESO participated in the Germany-wide Girls' Day activities, in which technical enterprises, universities and research organisations were invited

to organise an open day for girls, to give female school students an insight into science and technology professions and to encourage more of them to choose such careers in the future. The ESO Girls' Day, "An introduction to the work of the European Southern Observatory", was organised by a group of students and staff, with support from the education and Public Outreach Department.

Although the open day was publicised at relatively short notice, places were rapidly fully booked, and 33 students attended the event at ESO Headquarters in Garching. The students, aged between 11 and 15, came from a wide range of schools in the Munich area.

During the morning, a series of women speakers gave talks about the work of

ESO — whether in astronomy, technology, or engineering, how they had arrived at their current positions in the field, and current topics in astronomical research. After lunch, the visitors split into groups to try their hand at astrophysical exercises and calculations, observe the Sun with the help of volunteers from ESO's AGAPE group, tour the building and visit laboratories, and ask a representative from Human Resources about careers at

ESO. Finally, a live question-and-answer video connection to the VLT on Cerro Paranal let the students directly “visit” ESO's observatory site in Chile.

Girls' Day was an excellent opportunity for girls to discover the scientific, technological and engineering work of ESO. The feedback and questions asked made it clear that the students were inspired by what they saw, and many thanks are due

to the enthusiasm and hard work of the volunteers who put the Girls' Day programme together.

Links

Girls' Day in Germany: <http://www.girls-day.de/>

English information about Girls' Day in Germany: http://www.girls-day.de/English_Information

New Staff at ESO

Julien Girard

I am quite surprised to actually be writing this note for the Messenger. A couple of years ago I would never have believed I would be sitting in the VLT control room so often, understanding a lot of the stuff that's going on there, sometimes firing the laser out into the beautiful sky ...

Although my family was tremendously big, there weren't many scientists and I think I only got to look through a telescope once during my first ten years on Earth. One of my mom's uncles had a Meade 200 and we looked at the Moon. Since I showed an interest he actually wrote in his will that I should inherit the telescope. I did. But living in a city apartment, and spending most of my free time on ski slopes, sports fields and in violin classes, I am very ashamed not to have used the telescope much. Now as a professional astronomer, I have a growing amateur interest and one of these days I will definitely let my kids look through this telescope!

As I grew up — in the “middle-east of France” — I was always attracted by science and technology. I studied physics in college with a focus on physical measurement and instrumental techniques. This undergraduate experience in France fostered my interest in understanding

physical processes through measurement and mastering the instruments and methods used. I then completed a Master's degree in instrumentation physics at the University of Utah (USA), following on from my first degree. At Utah I carried out a research project for the High Energy Cosmic Ray group led by Pierre Sokolsky. Supervised by Lawrence Wiencke, I built a fiber-optic based calibration system for a giant cosmic ray observatory using the air fluorescence technique (the one that inspired the extensive air shower detectors of the Pierre Auger Observatory). This nice work and life experience motivated me to do research and study towards a PhD. Attracted by astronomy, I went for a second Master's degree in astrophysics in Grenoble (France) and learned the basics in many astronomical fields such as star formation and evolution, interstellar matter, galactic dynamics, cosmology, high angular resolution techniques, etc.

But clearly, I wanted to work closely with instruments so I chose my Master's thesis project on integrated optics component tests for interferometric beam merging (at LAOG/CEA in Grenoble). Then I was awarded a three-year scholarship to pursue full-time research in the AIRI team (Astronomy and Interferometric Resolution Imaging) at CRAL (Lyon) under the supervision of Renaud Foy. My PhD work



Julien Girard and family

was on the polychromatic laser guide star project ELPOA which aims at making diffraction-limited AO (adaptive optics) possible at visible wavelengths with full sky coverage. In fact, Renaud was the first (together with the well-known Antoine Labeyrie) to propose the artificial laser reference star concept to the astronomical community in 1985. I then worked for three years in Mexico City, first as a postdoctoral fellow at UNAM's Institute of Astronomy and then as a Professor at Instituto Politecnico Nacional (IPN). I completely embraced the country, melted in, had my wonderful “FrenXicán” daughter and got married with live musicians playing Huapangos Huastecos (songs