

Astronomers Without Borders and CienciaPR to Distribute Telescopes to Underserved Schools in Puerto Rico ^[1]

Submitted by [Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer](#) ^[2] on 14 May 2018 - 3:05pm



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SAN JUAN, PR – Starting this summer, children from all around Puerto Rico will be able to explore space from their schools' backyards. The non-profit organization Astronomers Without Borders and Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR) will distribute donated telescopes to 20 underserved schools in Puerto Rico. In addition to the telescopes, the schools will receive science education resources that include "The Universe at Your Feet", a collection of astronomy activities in Spanish for children and classrooms, and celestial planispheres or maps to help identify visible stars and constellations. This is all part of a new collaborative initiative called "Astronomía al Servicio" (Astronomy in Service), which seeks to promote education, scientific exploration, and citizen participation.

During the week of May 14-18, 2018, Mike Simmons, president of Astronomers Without Borders, along with Dr. Greetchen Díaz, director of science education for CienciaPR, and representatives

from the Puerto Rico Astronomy Society will be visiting schools to deliver the materials and launch the initiative. Renowned Puerto Rican astrophysicist, Dr. Wanda Díaz Merced, a key collaborator from the Office of Astronomy for Development of the International Astronomical Union, will also participate in the school visits.

“In our experience, programs like “Astronomía al Servicio” provide hope in difficult times. Astronomers Without Borders wants to demonstrate to the people of Puerto Rico that they are not alone as they rebuild their communities,” said Simmons. “Astronomy is not only a source of hope, but also inspiration. It provides a natural laboratory, as well as an introduction to many science, technology, engineering and math fields,” he added.

“This project provides new educational resources for use in the classroom, and will also connect students and teachers with a network of Puerto Rican scientists and astronomy aficionados that will encourage and empower them in their quest to learn more about the universe and the world around them,” said Dr. Díaz of CienciaPR.

Astronomers Without Borders raised more than \$3,000 in donations through a crowdfunding campaign for the purchase of the telescopes. They also received donations of astronomy books and other resources in Spanish from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, the David Chandler Company, Big Kid Science, and Edward Gomez.

Once the telescopes are delivered, volunteers from the Puerto Rico Astronomy Society will provide support for the use of the telescopes and the organization of astronomical observation nights. Over the next year, CienciaPR will serve as liaison for the 20 participating schools, coordinating visits from astronomers and other scientists, supporting schools in the establishment of astronomy clubs and in the use of the telescopes in the classrooms, and celebrating student activities through its network and social media channels. Teachers from the participating schools will also be invited to take part in CienciaPR’s “Ciencia al Servicio” workshops, which train educators to incorporate project-based learning (PBL) into their teaching and to make science relevant to students’ lives by incorporating challenges and examples observed in their communities and surroundings.

The group will visit schools in the municipalities of Guaynabo, Toa Baja, Naranjito, Barranquitas, Yabucoa, Humacao, Juncos, Patillas, Guayama, Vieques, Lajas, and San Juan, all of which were hard-hit by back-to-back hurricanes last fall. Several of the participating schools are part of Instituto Nueva Escuela, a non-profit dedicated to improving Puerto Rican students’ academic and socio-emotional outcomes through the implementation of Montessori education in the public school setting.

About Astronomers Without Borders

Astronomers Without Borders connects people worldwide through innovative programs that are accessible to everyone regardless of geography and culture. Combining local events with online technology and a global community, Astronomers Without Borders is a leader in promoting understanding and peaceful international relations, while also supporting outreach and education in astronomy. Astronomers Without Borders is a US 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit charitable organization incorporated in California. For more information visit:

About Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR)

Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR, www.cienciapr.org [4]) is a global community of more than 8,500 scientists, students, educators, and allies who believe that science can empower individuals with the knowledge, capacity, and agency to improve their lives and society. The organization leverages our rich and diverse community to democratize science, and transform science education and career training. Since 2006, CienciaPR has successfully engaged and trained scientists, students, and teachers, and created culturally relevant education resources and experiences that improve students attitudes and interests towards science and self-confidence in their science skills. CienciaPR's efforts over the last decade have garnered multiple recognitions, including being named a Bright Spot for Hispanic STEM Education by the White House in 2015 [5].

About the Puerto Rico Astronomy Society

The Puerto Rico Astronomy Society (PRAS) is the largest and oldest astronomical organization on the Puerto Rican archipelago. The mission of PRAS is to observe the night sky, disseminate astronomy, and promote research at the amateur level. It publishes the magazine "El Observador", distributed quarterly to over 100 schools and universities as well as to our partners and the scientific community. The PRAS is affiliated to NASA through the Puerto Rico Space Grant Consortium and its educational services are endorsed by that institution.

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