



Ad Astra Kansas Newsletter

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Fall 2025

Astronomy experts help push AAKF forward

by Jodi Spindler

The Ad Astra Kansas Foundation welcomes new board members Rick Heschmeyer of Lawrence and Brian Thomas of Topeka. Each brings a wealth of knowledge regarding astronomy and space to our foundation. We look forward to more collaboration and insight from these leaders in astronomy.



Rick Heschmeyer

Heschmeyer, a NASA Solar System Ambassador since 2006, has studied the skies for more than 40 years. He has given many presentations about

Brian Thomas

Thomas is a physics and astronomy professor at Washburn University. His interest in astrophysics has lead him be a regular presenter to area students and community groups. He is on the organizing committee for the Apeiron, Washburn's annual student research forum, and for the annual Mid-American Regional Astrophysics Conference. Thomas has long supported the Space Celebration Day as a faculty sponsor and by helping operate the Crane Observatory for the day.

star gazing and hosted star parties around northeast Kansas. Heschmeyer has contributed to news stories and made countless contributions to educational outreach throughout Washburn and the University of Kansas. He is president of the Astronomy Associates of Lawrence and has been a regular presenter at the Space Celebration Day educating students on meteorites. *Photo: NASA SSA website*

Thomas has been principal Investigator on a three-year \$500,000 research project funded by NASA's Astrobiology program. His research focuses on how life on Earth could be affected by high energy astrophysical events like supernovae and gamma-ray bursts.

Photo: WU website

Rising stars of Kansas shine at Galaxy Forum

AD Astra Kansas 2005 Scholarship winners, grad student Julian Chee of WSU and undergrad student Kai Smith of KU received their scholarship awards at the 2025 Galaxy Forum in Hutchinson on August 23. Both gave engaging presentations about the work that earned them the awards. We were also lucky to have Sarah Lamm presenting about her "Analog Astronaut Adventures" and Steve Durst extending an invitation to the Interstellar University Conference to be held in July 2026 in Topeka.

APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2026-2027 ACADEMIC YEAR SCHOLARSHIPS WILL OPEN IN NOVEMBER. WATCH WWW.ADASTRA-KS.ORG OR OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR INFORMATION.

Very relatable for students

"Innovations in Rocketry"

Chee shares step-by-step his work in developing in-flight stabilization for high-power rockets. He is generous with explanations and visuals.

CHEE Presentation

Includes some humor (see photo)

Formation of Organic Molecules in Space

Smith takes us to the Galactic center 25,000 light years away and shows us what star dust and other molecules could tell us about how the building blocks of life might form in space.

KAI SMITH Presentation

Far left: Sarah Lamm shares her time at the Mars Desert Research Station.

Other photos: Attendees inspecting Chee's rocket and asking questions of speakers.

Popular interstellar course returns

Online, asynchronous, self-paced

The Wichita Space Initiative Interstellar Seminars from 2022-24 are now available online as an online, asynchronous, self-paced course through the Wichita State University Mall. The seminar introduces participants to current research topics in interstellar space sciences. Over 30 1-hour lectures cover a range of topics related to interstellar robotic and peopled missions, including astronomy, life support systems, propulsion and social issues. It is self-paced with suggested paths through the material and supplementary readings. Each seminar is given by a top expert in their area of study, many of them the most well-known people in the field. This program does not award course credit or badges at WSU, however teachers can use it for continuing education credit. *Courtesy image*

Questions: email: space@wichita.edu Cost \$45.

[Wichita State University Mall](#) / to [Schneegurt Labs](#) to [Interstellar Seminar](#)

Message to the Moon

Space enthusiasts can send their name and a 100-character message to the Moon's surface in an opportunity provided by Space Age Publishing Company and International Lunar Observatory Association (ILOA). For \$50, the message will be loaded onto the data and storage drives of two upcoming rover missions— Astrolab's FLIP (Flex Lunar Innovation Platform) mission scheduled to launch to the Lunar South

Pole in December 2026 and its FLEX (Flexible Logistics and Exploration) one in 2026–2027. Your message will stay on the Moon forever (or until Astronauts repurpose the hardware)! Contributors will receive a digital thank you ticket showing the name and message that will be carried to the surface of the Moon. Kind of like a boarding pass.

Building on ILOA's successful landing on the Moon in 2024 of its ILO-X imaging instruments as part of the Nova-C lander mission, contributors will receive exclusive lunar photos from the ILO-1 which will be on the 2027 FLEX mission. Images from the 2024 landing are currently on the ILOA website: <https://iloa.org/gallery/>

Submit by October 31. Cost is US\$50. *Image credit: ILOA*

Send a Moon Message

KU doctoral student receives Fulbright Award

Levi Van Ryder, a KU doctoral student working in the field of nuclear physics, has been named a 2025-2026 Fulbright scholar. He will conduct experimental nuclear physics research at the Czech Technical University in the Czech Republic. *Photo: KU Website*

More

Interstellar R & D

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AD ASTRA KANSAS NEWS

This “Interstellar R&D” forty-eighth feature in the Ad Astra Kansas News continues a new editorial format experiment for the previous, this, and the next IR&D #s 46, 47, 48: *Interstellar University Exclusive Focus and Update*. The first 45 IR&D features with the Observation, Communication, and Transportation 3 column format provided a real-time chronicling of Interstellar Matters during the 1st quarter of the 21st Century, and perhaps more valuably, IR&D features 1-45 provide an introductory, fundamental, general Curriculum for a possible Interstellar University in the Ad Astra State. The 3 experimental IR&D features should enable more concentrated focus and advancement for IU. Ad Astra, Galactically – Steve Durst

IU Kansas / Intrastate research now engaging Neighbor states and Major states interstellar assets:

Kansas has central assets

Major States:

West in California – NASA / JPL/ Caltech, NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center, Vandenberg Space Launch Center, SpaceX, AeroJet Rocketdyne, Google, Apple, HP, Tesla

North in New York – Brookhaven National Lab, Statue of Liberty (Beacon of Independence), New York Stock Exchange, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

East in Florida – NASA Kennedy Space Center / Cape Canaveral Space Launch Center, Space Florida, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

South in Texas – SpaceX Starbase, NASA JSC, Space Center Houston, Intuitive Machines, Blue Origin, Firefly Aerospace

Neighbor States:

West in Colorado – Colorado University, Colorado School of Mines, United Launch Alliance, Ball Aerospace, Lockheed Martin, United States Space Force, Space Foundation, Space Command

North in Nebraska – Nebraska University, Strategic Air Command & Aerospace Museum

East in Missouri – Missouri University, Washington University, Gateway Arch

South in Oklahoma – Stafford Space Museum, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Space Industry Development Authority, Collins Aerospace

In coordination with this project, an INTERSTELLAR UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD IN TOPEKA ON JULY 1, 2026. If interested, request info at contact@adastra-ks.org

Mission of the Ad Astra Kansas Foundation

Our mission is to advance the Kansas State Motto, “Ad Astra Per Aspera” (to the stars through difficulties), by promoting space science and education in Kansas.

Vision: We envision a Kansas known in the 21st century as the Ad Astra State and as a leader in space science research, development and education. Our goal is to: Interest Inform Inspire

Ad Astra Kansas Foundation

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