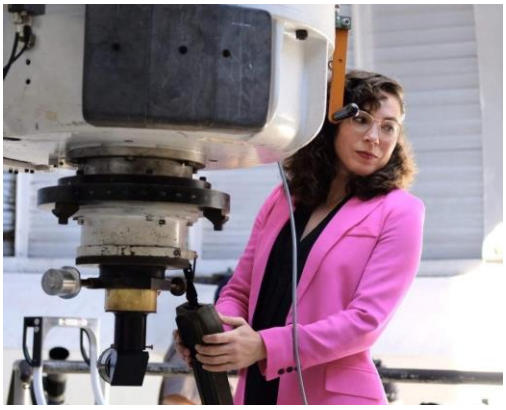
Steward Observatory Newsletter

May News

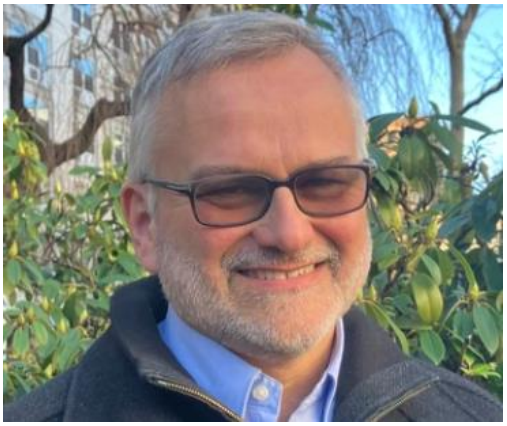


Erika Hamden in the New York Times: A Massive, Glow-in-the-Dark Cloud Lurking in Our Cosmic Backyard

Steward Observatory associate astronomy professor and Director of the U of A Space Institute Erika Hamden is part of a team that discovered a massive molecular cloud which would dominate our view of the night sky from Earth .. if it were discernible in the visible light spectrum. The New York Times featured the discovery, which is named Eos -- the same name as a proposed NASA mission Erika will be submitting later this year.. Learn more

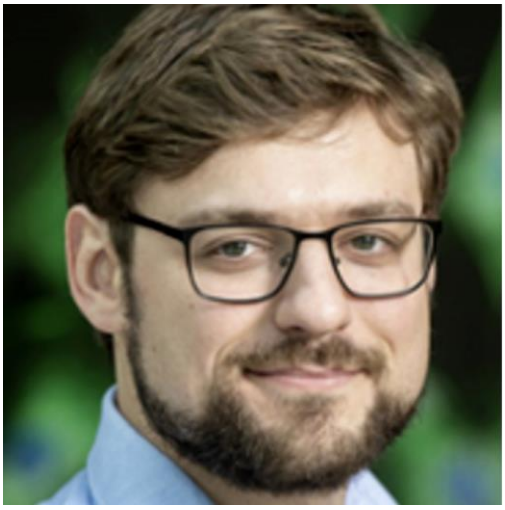
THE CONVERSATION: Scientists found a potential sign of life on a distant planet – Steward Observatory's Daniel Apai explains why many are still skeptical

A team of astronomers announced on April 16, 2025, that in the process of studying a planet around another star, they had found evidence for an unexpected atmospheric gas. On Earth, that gas – called dimethyl sulfide – is mostly produced by living organisms. Learn more



Dennis Zaritsky Honored with Prestigious Regents Professor Title

Zaritsky is recognized as one of the most innovative thinkers and researchers in astronomy. His accomplishments include using dwarf galaxies to map the distribution of dark matter in the Milky Way and other galaxies. His most influential work includes co-authoring the paper “A Direct Empirical Proof of the Existence of Dark Matter.” Zaritsky serves as deputy director of the university’s Steward Observatory and recently completed a six-year term as chair of the Giant Magellan Telescope Science Advisory Council. Learn more



“In search of Earth’s siblings,” Sebastiaan Haffert wins prestigious New Horizons Prize

‘The Oscars of the natural sciences’, is what they are called: the Breakthrough Prizes awarded annually in America by the Breakthrough Foundation. These include the New Horizons prizes for early-stage researchers. Sebastiaan Haffert, former Steward Observatory researcher at U of A, is this year's winner.

Sebastiaan Haffert worked at Steward Observatory from 2019 to 2024 on adaptive optics development for the Magellan Adaptive Optics eXtreme (MagAO-X) instrument and for technology development for the Giant Magellan Telescope. Learn more

U of A-led NASA Aspera mission hits spacecraft milestone

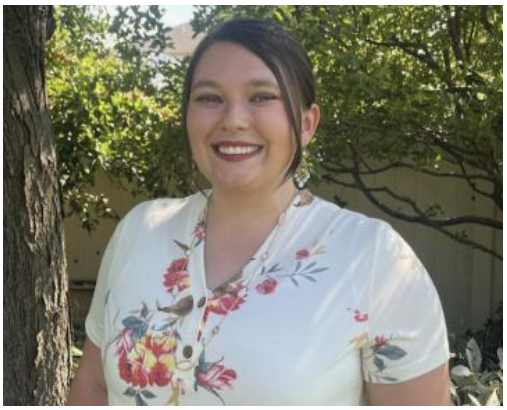
"Big science can now be done on small platforms, and the University of Arizona and Steward Observatory are big players in the SmallSat revolution." said Vargas.

The mission derives its name from the Latin word for "difficulty" or "hardship," because astronomers have never been able to successfully observe the hot gases that compose the circumgalactic medium. Aspera could be the first to do so. Learn more

Student Spotlight

Steward PhD Alum Mentors Teen Who Wins $250K for Using AI to Discover 1.5 Million Hidden Objects in Space

High school senior Matteo Paz stunned the astronomy world by uncovering 1.5 million previously unknown cosmic objects using a machine-learning model he developed at Caltech. Learn more

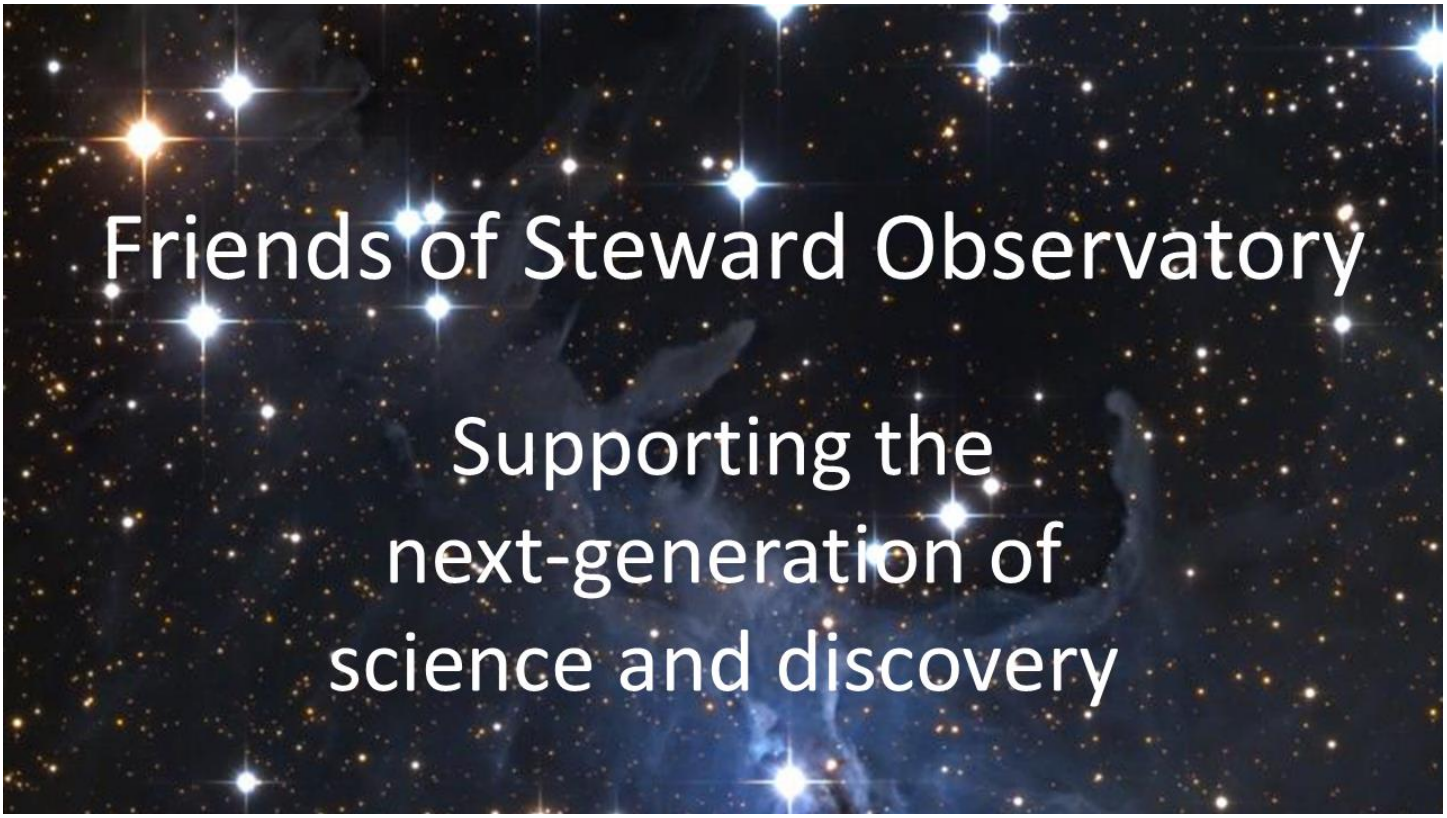


"Psyche Inspired" features work from talented Astronomy undergrad Jessica Gurney

Steward astronomy major Jessica Gurney created four bookbinding projects for the "Psyche Inspired" showcase. Pictured here is her “Psyche Mission Orbit A Notebook.” This book is the first in a series about the four orbits the spacecraft will inhabit once it reaches Psyche. Learn more

Mt. Lemmon Astronomy Camp alum wins the “Oscar of the natural sciences”

‘The Oscars of the natural sciences’, is what they are called: the Breakthrough Prizes awarded annually in America by the Breakthrough Foundation. These include the New Horizons prizes for early-stage researchers. Rebecca Jensen-Clem, a multi-year alumna of Steward Observatory's Astronomy Camp on Mt. Lemmon, is one of this year's winners for the New Horizons Prize in Physics. Learn more



As we head into May and prepare for graduation, we would like to thank our Friends of Steward Observatory for your support. Our seniors will leave the Department of Astronomy with the skills, experience, and confidence necessary to tackle the challenging problems of the future. Some of them will continue their education and are off to graduate school while others will head into industry or other scientific endeavors, each ready to make a difference.

Your donation has helped us give these students the knowledge and understanding they will now use in the next stage of their careers. Thank you!

Learn more

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