

Media Advisory

PALOMAR OBSERVATORY HONORS PAUMA BAND OF LUISEÑO INDIANS BY BESTOWING NEWLY DISCOVERED ASTEROIDS WITH NATIVE AMERICAN CELESTIAL NAMES

PAUMA INDIAN RESERVATION, Pauma Valley, California, April 7, 2009 -- Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians announces that three asteroids, recently discovered at Palomar Observatory will be given Native American names to honor the Luiseño Indians who are native to Palomar Mountain, a presentation will be held at the observatory on Tuesday, April 7, 2009 at 1:00 p.m.

Palomar Observatory will present officials from the Tribe with plaques depicting discovery photographs of the asteroids. Also, student artwork based on the asteroids and Luiseño names will be showcased.

Asteroid discoverer Jean Mueller found the asteroids years ago while operating a telescope as part of the Second Palomar Observatory Sky Survey. "It is a privilege to honor the culture of the people who have lived in this area for a millennium," says Mueller. "I wanted to recognize their history in a tangible fashion and naming asteroids for them seemed like a fitting thing to do."

The asteroid names feature figures from the Luiseño creation stories. The names selected were Tukmit (Father Sky), Tomaiyowit (Earth Mother), and Kwiila (black oak). "These names recognized the cultural ancestry of our people. We appreciate the opportunity to share our worldviews with the public and foster a greater understanding not only of our people's legacy in the valley but also in the universe at large," says Chairman Chris Devers.

Asteroid (12711) Tukmit was discovered January 19, 1991. Tukmit is Father Sky in the Luiseño creation story. He was made from nothingness and together with Tomaiyowit bore the First People. The First People became all the people, animals, plants, and inanimate objects of the earth, the basis of Luiseño existence.

Asteroid (11500) Tomaiyowit was discovered October 28, 1989. Tomaiyowit is Earth Mother in the Luiseño creation story. She, together with Tukmit gave birth to the First People, which are all things and features of the earth forming the basis of Luiseño existence.

Asteroid (9162) Kwiila was discovered July 29, 1987. Kwiila is one of the First People in the Luiseño creation story. Kwiila means black oak, which is indigenous to Palomar Mountain where the Luiseño traditionally gathered acorns during the summer months.

The discoverer, Jean Mueller, is a night assistant at Palomar Observatory and currently the senior telescope operator on the 200-inch Hale Telescope. But for almost 15 years, she exposed wide-field photographic plates for the Second Palomar Observatory Sky

Survey (POSSII) with the 48-inch Samuel Oschin Telescope. The POSSII survey complements an original sky survey done with the same telescope back in the early 1950's.

During the course of the sky survey, Mueller scanned most of the plates. Specifically, under high magnification, looking closely at the images searching for comets, supernovae (exploding stars) and fast moving asteroids. In the course of her work, Mueller discovered 15 comets, 107 supernovae and 14 asteroids.

The rules for naming comets and supernovae don't allow the discoverer to have any say in their names, but for asteroids the discoverer has the right to bestow names. Asteroids, also called minor planets, are first "numbered" after accurate orbits have been determined. Many of the asteroids that she discovered are Apollo-type asteroids. Apollo asteroids have orbits that cross the orbit of Earth and have the potential to someday impact Earth. There are rules to naming Apollo asteroids that are governed by the 15-person Committee for Small-Body Nomenclature of the International Astronomical Union. It was only recently that cultures such as the Luiseño could be honored in this way.

About the Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians

Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians is a federally recognized tribal government located in the Pauma Valley of Southern California. The Pauma Band is one of seven Bands of the Luiseño people located in San Diego and Riverside counties. Pauma produces Hass avocados, Valencia oranges and lemons; and is engaged in protection and reforestation of their tribal lands. The Pauma tribe owns and operates Casino Pauma, providing employment to their tribal members and the surrounding communities. Its revenues enhance the Tribal Government's ability to meet the essential needs of the membership. www.pauma-nsn.gov

About Palomar Observatory

The Palomar Observatory is located in north San Diego County, California. It is a world-class center of astronomical research that is owned and operated by the California Institute of Technology. The observatory is home to five telescopes that are nightly used for a wide variety of astronomical research programs. The research is conducted by Caltech's faculty, post-doctoral fellows and students, and by researchers at Caltech's collaborating institutions. The Palomar Observatory is open to the public daily. For more information visit: www.astro.caltech.edu/observatories/palomar/

Media Contact:

Joely Proudfit, PR Consultant, Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians /Naqmayam Communications, (650) 255-2860, jproudfit@naqcom.com