

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the APR09 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

Taking Physics and Now the Stars on the Road With the Magic Physics Bus

DAVID BENNUM, University of Nevada, Reno

In February 2003 the “Physics on the Road” workshop, held at Colorado State University- Fort Collins, Colorado, brought together physics faculty who were experienced in designing and providing year –round mobile physics displays and those who were interested in initiating similar outreach programs. The impetus for the workshop was the upcoming “World Year of Physics”, but the workshop had much broader impact for many of us who attended. The University of Nevada had a long history of demonstration shows for campus visitors from K-12 students/faculty but the cost of field trips began to limit this for many schools, especially for schools in poorer neighborhoods without large scale parental fundraising. The timing of the workshop was perfect for my developing program to utilize a donated “electric bus” as a traveling physics demo showcase. The program has grown to near our current limitations (70 mile range of the bus and time considerations), however we are expanding the “scope” of the project to include evening astronomy “star parties” as we enter the “Year of Astronomy”. In addition to the bus transport of portable astronomy equipment to school sites we are adding, through donation, a 22 inch telescope in a domed observatory at a secondary campus location at the edge of Reno where large scale “star parties” can be conducted as outreach to K-12 and the community. The “Physics on the Road” bus reaches several thousand elementary and middle school students every year now and the potential for similar outreach with “Stars on the Road” has excited several of our faculty and physics students into increased participation in these endeavors to introduce our young people to science. It has become one of our most active “recruitment” plans and growing numbers of local students entering physics and other science majors is anecdotal evidence of success.