

Pulsars and Pretzels

Every night, patrons pour into a bar in Old Town Pasadena and sit themselves down at long wooden tables. Beneath the blue and white Bavarian flags that adorn the dimly lit hall, they gulp down great mugs of sudsy beer and dine on German-style pub food.

Most of the time, the bar, Der Wolfkopf, is filled with the din of sports blaring from big TVs on the walls, mingled with conversations, laughter, and glasses clinking. But once a month, Caltech astronomers take over to present Astronomy on Tap, an evening of black holes and bratwurst, wormholes and witbier, pulsars and pretzels.

Astronomy on Tap began as an outreach program in New York City several years ago and has now spread to cities across the United States and even into Canada, the Netherlands, and Chile. The idea is to take the science of astronomy out of its isolation in sterile labs and present it to the public in a fun, comfortable environment. As its slogan goes, "Science is even better with beer."

Cameron Hummels, a Caltech post-doctoral scholar in astronomy, was first exposed to the Astronomy on Tap model during his time at Columbia University, where he was the Department of Astronomy's director of public outreach. When he arrived at Caltech two years ago, he brought many of the outreach practices from Columbia with him. In January 2016, he started an astronomy lecture series on campus that has been well attended by the public, but he also wanted a way to reach out to people who might be more ambivalent about science.

"A lot of times, the audience at the lectures consists of people who already have an interest in science," Hummels says. "Astronomy on Tap breaks down the barrier of going to an educational institution to learn. This is chill."



Since Caltech's Astronomy on Tap began last year, there have been more than a dozen events, each featuring trivia games, prizes, and two astronomers discussing a topic of their choosing. In keeping with the spirit of the event, the topics are presented informally, and sometimes with colorful names like "Galaxies Are People Too" or "Pulsars: Spinning Stellar Corpses."

Rahul Patel, a postdoctoral researcher at Caltech's IPAC, led a discussion called "Jupiter: Exposed" shortly after the Juno spacecraft began sending back imagery from that planet.

"The audience was receptive. They laughed at my corny jokes, and they had a lot of fun," Patel says. "I got a lot of really good questions and people engaged me right afterward wanting to know more."

Patel says events like Astronomy on Tap give the public a better understanding of both science and the scientists conducting it, while teaching scientists

how to relate better to the public.

"There's a misconception of scientists as elitists," he says. "It's good for the public to see we're really no different from anyone else—we like good entertainment and a glass of beer."

Hummels has built on the success of Astronomy on Tap with other outreach programs, like one he calls Science Train, in which volunteers board Gold Line trains with signs identifying that they're astronomers and make themselves available to answer questions from the public. Another called Sidewalk Astronomy has volunteers set up telescopes on sidewalks in Old Town Pasadena to give passersby the opportunity to observe the night sky in a different way. Both of those programs debuted in August.

For a schedule of future Astronomy on Tap and other upcoming events, visit astro.caltech.edu/outreach/.

—Emily Velasco

Campus Hubs—a Caltech History

The Winnett Student Center has been a campus landmark for more than 50 years. This summer, the Italianate building—home to the Red Door Café, the Caltech Store, the ticket office, and a recording studio (as well as sundry meeting spaces)—was demolished to make room for a new campus hub: the Hameetman Center—named in honor of Caltech trustee Fred Hameetman (BS '62) and his wife, Joyce—is slated for a December 2018 open.

Winnett itself is only the latest in a long line of campus hubs that have come and gone on this same site. In 1915, a building known as the Old Dorm stood there (which itself had been moved from North Los Robles Avenue where it had served as a dormitory for the original Throop Polytechnic Institute).

The Old Dorm was the Institute's first student residence, with rooms for 60 undergrads. It also boasted a lunchroom known as the Greasy Spoon. Up until then, faculty and students had brought lunch to campus. "With the advent of the 'Greasy Spoon,'" noted a Caltech press release at the time, "deluxe dinners were available, soup to nuts, for \$.30, including seconds."

A student center was built next to the Old Dorm in 1924, designed by Pasadena architectural legend Henry Greene, and named the Dugout in memory of a popular campus sandwich shop. The building's focal point was its unique fireplace, built with the proceeds of a fundraiser in which engraved bricks were offered for a dollar apiece. (Forty years later, the fireplace wall was preserved and integrated into the design of Winnett—and will be preserved as the site morphs again into the Hameetman Center.)

A major remodeling of the Dugout took place in 1934, and with it came a new name: the Throop Club. The 1935 *Big T* described how the new space was

celebrated with a party "in which heavy gambling and equally heavy doughnut and cider inhaling figured prominently."

Nearly three decades later, the Old Dorm was demolished to make way for the Winnett Student Center, which opened in 1962, funded by Pasadena resident P. G. Winnett, board chairman of Bullock's department store and a Caltech trustee from 1939 to 1968. The center was enlarged and renovated in 1998.

A generous gift from Fred and Joyce Hameetman initiated the design to replace the current facility. The new

Hameetman Center will include a rehearsal hall for Caltech's music programs, made possible by a gift from Steven Frautschi, emeritus professor of theoretical physics, and his wife, Mie. "With this new structure," says Joe Shepherd, vice president for student affairs, "we will be able to remedy the many limitations of Winnett to provide an attractive and inviting community gathering center as well as provide much-needed rehearsal space for our very popular music programs."

—Judy Hill



The Winnett student lounge in the 1960s.

For a timeline of Caltech student hubs through the decades, go to caltech.edu/post/campus-hubs