

## Coming to iPhone near you: near-live UA telescope shots

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Otto Ross Arizona Daily Star Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Monday, May 3, 2010 12:00 am | Comments

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The iPhone just got even more far out - into space, that is.

The new Transient Events iPhone and iPod Touch application is giving the public a front-row seat to the cataclysmic goings-on of the universe, using University of Arizona telescopes.

"We're trying to get people energized and in tune that the sky changes a lot on a nightly basis," said Ed Beshore, director of the Catalina Sky Survey and a senior staff member at the UA's Lunar and Planetary Lab.

The free application can be downloaded from the Apple iTunes store onto any iPhone or iPod Touch. Once downloaded, the application allows professional and amateur astronomers alike to receive real-time images of transient or changing objects in the night sky as observed by the Lunar and Planetary Lab's Catalina Sky Survey.

Since 1998, the Catalina Sky Survey has been observing transient and near-Earth objects from Mount Bigelow in the Santa Catalina Mountains. On a good night, the sky survey can witness up to a dozen notable, changing objects in the universe.

Based on personal preferences, the Transient Events application will alert users whenever the survey witnesses significant events, such as a supernova, moving asteroids or exploding galactic cores.

The iPhone notification will provide four images of the event taken over 40 minutes. Date and time information also will be provided, as well as a finder chart that will allow users to locate the event using a home telescope.

"What's cool about this is that it has appeal all the way from an armchair astronomer who just wants to see how much the universe is changing all the way to the professional astronomer," Beshore said.

The application was proposed and funded by the outreach team of the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope, or LSST, a project that plans to conduct observations similar to those of the Catalina Sky Survey but will have much more extensive capabilities.

The UA Mirror Lab is working on building the telescope's unique wide-field mirror. The telescope team

also hopes to have a similar method of reaching the public when its telescope goes live in 2016.

Transient Events is a "beta test" of how the team plans to mix popular media with science, said Jonathan Myers, a software developer with LSST.

"The idea of keeping people really connected to science the same way they're connected to Facebook is a really neat idea," he said. "It breaks down some of the barriers between the image of the guy in a white lab coat up on a mountain versus the average person."

While images sent through the application will typically illustrate only a change in brightness of a star or a shift of position in the night sky, Myers is confident that just about everyone will appreciate the ability to witness these extraordinary events as soon as they happen.

"If you're curious about seeing what an active universe we live in, if you see any of the magic in knowing when mankind has knowledge of what's happening in distant galaxies, then certainly this is something you will find really cool," he said.

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