**Krauss lecture is latest splash for UAF physics club**

By Jeff Richardson

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Society of Physics Students has made a habit of exceeding expectations.

So when club leaders asked famed physicist Lawrence Krauss to make a low-budget trip to speak in Fairbanks, perhaps it shouldn’t have been a surprise that he quickly snatched up the offer. Krauss, who normally commands a five-figure speaking fee, accepted the invitation to visit UAF in return for an Arctic polar-bear viewing trip next September.

“We set our sights high,” said club President Georgeanna Heaverley with a laugh.

Krauss, a cosmologist, astrophysicist and expert on dark matter and dark energy, will speak at 7 p.m. March 2 at the West Valley High School Performing Arts Center. Admission is free.

Bringing a well-known lecturer to Fairbanks isn’t a stretch for the group, which has figured out how to draw a crowd.

Last spring, after discovering that the Physics Department had seven telescopes in its inventory, the SPS club decided to host a stargazing party near UAF’s West Ridge. They pointed the telescopes at interesting points in the sky and stationed a club member near each one to offer a quick astronomical explanation.

At least 200 people showed up, forming long lines to peek through a telescope at stars and planets. When an encore stargazing party was held last November, about 400 people arrived to look at the heavens.

“It’s definitely really cool when somebody looks through a telescope and they’ve never looked at the moon or Jupiter before,” said SPS Vice President Riley Troyer. “It’s fun to look at their awe and wonder.”

The UAF College of Natural Science and Mathematics has roughly 60 students enrolled in the physics program, but SPS has only about 15 members, including some students from other disciplines. Despite those small numbers, Heaverley and Troyer said, public outreach has become one of the club’s primary goals.

The club has held its share of standard-issue fundraisers — karaoke nights, auctions and bake sales — but has also judged science fairs and hosted popular-science speakers. When a math and science career expo was held at UAF earlier this month, members of the club unexpectedly showed up to volunteer.

“They were fantastic,” said UAF physics Professor David Newman, who serves as the SPS faculty advisor. “Watching them made my heart swell with pride.”

Both Heaverley and Troyer have been able to use their SPS experience to pursue other opportunities. Heaverley has attended a women’s leadership conference in the past two years through the American Physical Society; Troyer is heading to Washington, D.C., this summer for an internship with the national SPS organization.

They said their efforts also have a goal of raising the profile of the UAF Physics Department, which is sometimes overshadowed by bigger science and engineering programs on campus.

“It’s pretty small, but for its size it’s one of the best in the country,” Heaverley said.

For more information, visit the UAF SPS Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/uafsps](http://www.facebook.com/uafsps).

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**Cutlines**

*Meghan Murphy photo
UAF Society of Physics Students officers Riley Troyer and Georgeanna Heaverley demonstrate how colliding pucks reveal dynamics of momentum and kinetic energy. The society uses demonstrations like these at various outreach events in Fairbanks.*

*Meghan Murphy photo
A levitating superconductor shows the properties of quantum physics in a demonstration for high school and college students.*

*Meghan Murphy photo
SPS Vice President Riley Troyer teaches a visiting high school student how diffraction glasses separate light into its constituent parts.*