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SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 2010

EVENTS Dragon*Con countdown: Stephen W. Ramsden, solar astronomer

Posted by [Curt Holman](#) on Sat, Aug 28, 2010 at 7:35 AM

*Dragon*Con's celebrity guest list includes more than TV/movie actors with cult followings. Culture Surfing counts down to the Labor Day fantasy convention with a series of short profiles of Dragon*Con guests who specialize in more surprising disciplines.*

What is your title, and where do you live?

Â I am a Solar Astronomer and NASA/JPL Solar System Ambassador. I am also the executive director of the nation's largest privately funded Solar Astronomy Outreach Program, the **Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project**. Â I live in Virginia Highlands with my wife, Natalie Anderson Ramsden, and our two lil' slobbery Boston Terriers, Johnny and Biggie.Â

What do you do in your day job?

In my real life I am a U.S. Navy veteran and full-time air traffic controller in Atlanta.

Have you been to Dragon*Con before?

Â This will be my 2nd Dragon*Con.Â The director of the Space Track invited me last year to set up my scopes on the Hilton pool deck and show the sun to the attendees.Â I was a little cautious, as I had no idea what to expect. I had only heard of the event through the most socially-inept geeks on



COURTESY OF STEPHEN W. RAMSDEN

HERE COMES THE SUN KING: Stephen W. Ramsden

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Sorry if I hurt your feelings. You're sensitive or you wouldn't be an artist.

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Re: More Beltline art vandalized

Earth and had always thought that it was a little out of my realm. Boy, was I mistaken. Sure, there are always a share of "live in my mom's basement" types at any science event, but the folks at Dragon*Con turned out to be a really fun-loving bunch of professional adults.

I will be displaying my observatory-quality narrowband solar telescopes on the pool deck of the Hilton again this year, every day from 11 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., clear skies permitting. I will also have a full table of giveaway items including NASA literature on the sun and free solar viewing glasses for everyone, supplied to me by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, of which I am a proud lifetime member.

How did you get interested in this vocation?

I have always been an astronomy fan and a science geek. I never did much with it until a close friend and fellow air traffic controller, Charlie Bates, committed suicide about four years ago. I realized how much of the fortunes that I had been born with had been wasted on showering myself with material possessions and compensating for insecurities. I finally made a pledge to myself that I would stop worrying about what I had considered to be my big problems or about getting rich and to do something to help other people.

It would have to be something that I liked to do and was good at. It also had to be something that other people were interested in. So, this canceled out air guitar, styling my own hair, and lying on the couch. The only thing left was astronomy! But it seemed that years of looking at radar scopes [as an air traffic controller] had taken their toll on my night vision so I became a solar astronomer because it is always done in the daylight.

Since then through some lucky strokes of fortune, and a lot of my cash and others donations invested, I have been able to establish myself as a world leader in solar photography and solar astronomy outreach. I have seen over 110,000 students and adults with my solar astronomy program at over 300 events since 2007. There is nothing, and I mean nothing, more rewarding than the startled look of "wow" on a person's face when they look at the magic magnetic activity on the Sun's surface.

Is there an aspect of genre fandom or Dragon*Con events that appeals to you from outside your professional field?

I have always been a Star Trek/Star Wars/SciFi fan. I basically kept it to myself and just enjoyed the shows and the dreams they produce in the quiet of my own home. I think I share my wife's love for the Steam Punk outfits at Dragon*Con. (Of course, it has nothing to do with the thousands of hot geeky women running around in skin-tight outfits attached to batteries.)

Do you have a message about your vocation that you'd like spectators to come away with?

Yes, get off your asses and do something for others. It is MUCH more fun and rewarding to give it away than it ever was to make it.

What's your web site?

www.charliebates.org The Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project provides free visits to area youth groups or festivals/events of all kinds. For more information, or if you would like to contribute to the program, please email info@charliebates.org

Tags: [Stephen W. Ramsden](#), [solar astronomy](#), [The Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project](#), [Dragon*Con](#), [Dragon*Con countdown](#)

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naw... pretty sure you're just an a-hole.

Posted by [getta grip, dude](#)

on August 27, 2010

Re: More Beltline art vandalized

No, I'm an Ass Man.

Posted by [oydave](#)

on August 27, 2010

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Yea Stephen!! You so deserve every chance you can get to tell everyone of the great things you do with your Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project. You were wonderful last year with everyone who came to see the star that gives us life and I know you will be this year as well. I am very happy and very lucky that you agreed to bring your Solar Astronomy to my Space Track. Anyone reading this, if you ever have the chance to see Stephen and his great setup of solar telescopes, DO IT! You will be so amazed. And make sure you bring your kids! :-)

rain
Director - Space Track

Posted by rain on August 29, 2010 at 2:34 AM | [Report this comment](#)

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