Enjoy your visit to the Gunnison Valley Observatory!

What is it? The Gunnison Valley Observatory or GVO is a publically-owned facility, managed by an all-volunteer board of directors and staffed and operated by dedicated volunteers who perform the multitude of tasks necessary to ensure your visit is a pleasant and educational experience!

How do I get there? The GVO is located at 2804 County Road 38 – also known as Gold Basin Road - just east of the Hartman Rocks Recreation Area. To get there, drive west out of Gunnison on US Highway 50 and turn left onto Country Road 38 just before the twin bridges across the Gunnison River. There is a brown directional sign for both Hartman Rocks and the Gunnison Observatory indicating your turn. For the next 2.10 miles, stay on County Road 38 around the end of the Regional Airport runway and then head south across the valley bottom and Tomichi Creek. The Observatory will be on your left just before the housing subdivisions. You cannot see the facility from the road as it is located within an earthen berm to help shield light from the telescopes. Park in the parking lot and then walk along the graveled entry lane into the berm.

When is it open? The Observatory is open Friday and Saturday evenings for public viewing from the second week in June through the second week in September.

The GVO can also be rented by individuals or groups for private viewing on other evenings. The cost starts at $150 for the evening. Go to the GVO's website: www.gunnisonobservatory.org for more information.

When should I arrive? The facility opens at sunset and educational programs start at dusk in the classroom. We don't set a specific time as sunset varies throughout the year, so just check the sky. You can't view the wonders of the night sky until its dark!

How much does it cost? The GVO operates strictly on greatly-appreciated donations. The suggested donation is $5.00 per adult and $3.00 for children. Of course, if you enjoy your visit, we appreciate anything you can give! Please note, lectures held in the classroom and the potential wait time between viewing opportunities in the dome, sometimes test the patience of younger children. Children are welcome but please plan for their needs and attention span.

What should I wear and bring? Even summer nights in the beautiful, high mountain, Gunnison Valley can be cool. Bring a jacket or a warm sweater. You can even bring a small blanket if you want to stretch out and enjoy the night sky and maybe spot a "shooting star" or two. Insect repellant is also helpful around twilight. Even though there are solar lights along the entry lane, you might want to bring a small flashlight for the walk back to your vehicle after the night's viewing. A light with a red lens is ideal to help ensure your night vision isn't disrupted! The only other things to bring are your imagination and sense of wonder for what you'll see.

What's happens during a typical visit to the observatory? After parking your vehicle in the lot, follow the graveled entry lane and stop at the "Solar System Stations" that line the lane. Each station depicts a planet in our solar system. Once inside the berm you'll see the silver-domed Observatory. The smaller wood observatory building located on the south side of the facility is

the Dr. Ted Violett Memorial Educational Observatory. The building has a roll-off roof that allows for telescopes in the building to be used for astronomic research and education purposes.

Inside the main observatory you will be asked to sign in the guest book and to make a donation for the GVO operations. In July and August, educational presentations on a variety of interesting astronomy topics will take place in the classroom. While you wait for the program to begin, take a look at the glow-in-the dark star chart located on the classroom wall and see how many constellations you can pick out! You can also check out the educational posters and photographs lining the walls of the classroom. A small gift shop offering bottled water and a variety of educational and fun astronomy gifts is worth a look and a buy! Take home a souvenir for the kids or grandkids. The classroom seats 30 visitors. The program lasts about 30 minutes. Feel free to ask questions. We love them! Astronomy education is one of our primary goals!

If the classroom is full, a second program will take place after the first. While you wait for the classroom program or if you don't want to sit through the program, head outside the facility where smaller telescopes will be set up and staffed to expand your viewing opportunities! A wide variety of planets and objects can be viewed through these scopes. You can also view the night sky with your eyes or binoculars and learn about constellations, planets and stars.

When it is dark, 15 visitors at a time will ascend the spiral staircase into the dome. Unfortunately, due to our size and space constraints, the dome is not accessed by an elevator. Physically disabled visitors are encouraged to view through the easily accessible outside telescopes. Visitors in the dome will sit in the seats circling the GVO's main telescope – the 30" Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector telescope. You will experience the rotation of the computer-driven dome above your head and will each take turns viewing a night sky object. This could be a nebula, double star, globular cluster, planet, the moon or many other wonders. Be aware, when the moon is fullest, the reflected light off its surface can sometimes make telescope viewing of far-off objects less distinct. Cloud cover can also affect viewing. Unfortunately, the telescope can't see through sunlight or clouds. Once each visitor has a chance to view two objects through the big telescope, you will be asked to go back downstairs and view objects through the smaller outside telescopes and allow other visitors a chance to view through the big scope. Once all visitors have a chance to view through the 30" scope, they can rotate back upstairs, 15 at a time, into the dome and have additional viewing times. We try our best to get all of our visitors viewing time through the large and smaller telescopes. Each offers a distinct and different viewing opportunity.

We look forward to welcoming you to the Gunnison Valley Observatory!
Carpe Noctem – Seize the Night