

Introduction

Due to our close working relationship with the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks, HAL has been entrusted with copies of the keys to Alpha Ridge Park and Carrs Mill Park so we can observe at night after the parks are closed to the public. This is an extraordinary act of trust on the part of the County, and requires a reciprocal degree of responsibility on the part of those who are entrusted with these keys by HAL. HAL members are invited to become keyholders by the HAL Board of Directors. The Board only invites members in good standing who are well known for their responsibility and trustworthiness to become keyholders. Keyholders are required to deposit \$50 with the HAL treasurer as a symbolic acknowledgement of the seriousness of this trust.

Duties of the Keyholder

In return for the privilege of holding a key and being able to open HAL's observing sites, HAL requires keyholders to accept certain responsibilities:

- In general, keys must be held and used only by the keyholder. In rare cases, another HAL member in good standing may borrow a key for a brief period in order to allow them to observe when the keyholder is unable to go out with them. In those cases, an e-mail should be sent to the HAL President and the HAL Treasurer when the key is borrowed indicating to whom the key has been lent, and another e-mail should be sent when the key has been returned. The HAL keyholder will be held responsible for the prompt return of the key and for its proper use while borrowed.
- Keys must not be duplicated under any circumstances. Each key clearly states this, and locksmiths are aware that this type of key should not be duplicated without special permission.
- Should a key be lost or stolen, the HAL President, HAL Treasurer and HAL Events Coordinator should be immediately notified.
- Each keyholder is expected to host their share (usually two) of star parties during the year. Instructions for hosting star parties are below.
- To the extent possible, keyholders are asked to support requests from HAL members who want to go out observing on days when no star party is scheduled (see the Impromptu Sessions article on the HAL website at http://www.howardastro.org/starparties.php#Impromptu_Sessions). In general, the policy of the Board is to invite those members who have shown the free time and interest to attend impromptu events to become keyholders and host them.
- Keyholders should bring their HAL membership card, and a copy of the letter authorizing HAL to use the parks (which is on the HAL website), with them whenever they are using a park after dark (including when hosting a star party as described below).
- Parks must be locked after use. Under no circumstances should the last keyholder leave an observing event without locking up the park.

Duties of the Star Party Host

Hosting a star party is a simple and enjoyable activity. There is very little difference between hosting a public star party and a members-only star party. We don't try to enforce a ban on non-

members during a star party, so although we don't encourage the public to attend our members-only parties, we don't turn them away if they show up. As the host, you have the following responsibilities:

- Show up at least 30 minutes before sunset. For public star parties, it is a good idea to put up the HAL sign so people will know where we set up and will not wander all over the park looking for us. Bring a cellphone so you can call 911 in case of emergency.
- We do not cancel star parties in advance, no matter what the weather may be. As the host, you need to be at the park even if it is pouring rain. Experience has shown that people will show up in any weather for a star party, and as the host you'll need to be there to tell them that the party is cancelled. If the weather is bad, you are free to leave at dusk when the park employee locks up the park. Do not lock up the park while it is still open to the public!
- Welcome people as they arrive and introduce yourself to them as the host for the night. At a members-only party you will likely have nothing else to do during the party, but at a public party you may have to answer some questions. Make sure you know where the portable toilets are at Alpha Ridge.
- When the park employee comes around at dusk to check on the park, go up to them and introduce yourself as the star party host. They will probably ask you if you have the key, and if you say that you do they will probably say goodnight and leave. It is possible that they will ask to see your HAL membership card and/or authorization letter, so have them handy.
- You need to be the last person to leave the party, and you need to close and lock the gate on your way out (just as you do for an impromptu event). You may choose to stay until everyone else is finished observing, but you should feel free to declare the party closed and ask any remaining observers to leave at any time after 11:00 PM. If everyone leaves before 11 (which typically happens only if the night is cloudy or very cold), you are free to leave and close up the park at that time. If another keyholder wants to stay later than you do, you are welcome to ask them to close up the park for you, but you should not leave until you've ensured that someone will lock up the park.

Conclusion

Thank you very much for agreeing to be a keyholder for HAL and for your care in discharging this responsibility. In our ten years of operation we've never had a problem, which is a tribute to HAL and its keyholders.