

# Bopp to top ceremony with stellar speech

■ Thomas Bopp received an honorary doctor of science from YSU.

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ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

Thomas Bopp's life changed forever July 22, 1995. That's the day the former YSU student discovered Comet Hale-Bopp while out stargazing with some friends. This spring, Hale-Bopp came closest to Earth, putting on a spectacular show that was visible in the Youngstown area.

Now, after a year during which he has become an international celebrity, Bopp returns to YSU March 20th to give the commencement address and to receive an honorary doctor of science degree.

"I have a great interest in astronomy," said Bopp. "And the comet has opened a lot of doors for me."

Bopp graduated from Chaney High School and attended YSU as a business administration major. However, he moved to Arizona before he could complete his degree.

In Arizona, he began to observe with a group of friends who called themselves the North Phoenix Alternative Astronomical Society. On the night he discovered the comet, he was using a homemade 17-and-a-half inch telescope made by a friend.

"I saw a very dim, very tiny object with no tail," said Bopp. "My first thought was that it was a very dim galaxy."

After consulting star charts and checking for movement against the sky, Bopp realized he had discovered a new comet.

Dr. Warren Young, Chair of physics and astronomy, said when an amateur astronomer discovers an object, they call it in to the International Astronomical Union, which verifies the discovery.

In the case of multiple people re-

porting the same sight, only the first three to call in get credit.

Along with Bopp, Alan Hale of New Mexico called in the discovery on the same night.

"(Comet Hale-Bopp) never got any closer to the Earth than the distance to the sun," said Young. "But it was bright enough to see downtown."

Young also said the comet is one of the three biggest in all of recorded history.

Since the discovery of the comet, Bopp has been travelling around the world and speaking before many important audiences. He spoke at the Astron convention in Italy, which was attended by 20,000 people during a three-day period. He also spoke at the Royal Society in England.

At Birr in Ireland, he saw the telescope built by Lord Rosse in the 1840s.

With a reflector 72 inches across, it was the largest telescope in the world for nearly a century and was used to discover the spiral structure of galaxies.

While there, he was able to view the original handwritten documents composed by the light of an oil lamp.

"I hope that someday I can find a corporate sponsor to publish these documents," he said.

While at Birr, he mentioned that amateur astronomy in Europe was lagging behind that in America because of the Value Added Tax.

An instrument that would cost a couple of hundred dollars in the United States would cost nearly a thousand dollars.

Because of this speech, he was introduced to Ireland's finance

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minister and the VAT is now in the process of being dropped, said Bopp.

Bopp has also started a non-profit organization that plans to build three telescopes.

"I'll be working with schools so children can access these telescopes remotely through the Internet," Bopp said.

Young said Bopp is not the only famous person to come out of YSU's astronomy program.

Ron Parise, a classmate of Bopp's, is an astronaut and a member of the first team to operate a telescope from space.

Another YSU alumnus, Joe Tucciarone, is well-known for his space paintings.

Bopp is scheduled to give the winter commencement address March 20.