



## President's Message

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### Jacob's Dream

"Nothing happens unless first a dream"  
- Carl Sandburg

All of us have had experiences where the right people come together at the right time to complete a project. Some call this synchronicity, which the 10th edition of Collins English Dictionary defines as "an apparently meaningful coincidence in time of two or more similar or identical events that are causally unrelated." This happened to me on a trip to Ghana in 2006 and the end result was the fulfillment of a dream that Dr. Jacob Ashong had held for over 30 years.

Jacob, a medical researcher who has done research in the UK and the U.S., had a dream. It was not just a dream. It was a consuming passion. If you ever have the opportunity to meet Jacob, you will be astonished by his energy, his enthusiasm and the multitude of projects that he dreams of completing. Most of them involve the children of Ghana.

Educated in the UK, Jacob and his family left Ghana during the tough economic times of the early 1980's. While living in London, he had the opportunity to visit the London Planetarium. Ghana, like most developing countries, struggles with science education. How can science be made more interesting to students? How can they be motivated to study science in secondary school and beyond? Jacob realized that a planetarium could address these issues and that it was important to reach young Ghanaian students and get them get excited about the Universe.

### A vision of science

He began to visualize a science center with a planetarium at its core. First, he had the dream. He didn't have the money or the expertise to complete it. But that didn't matter. The years passed and Jacob continued to hold the dream in his heart.

As the internet developed, planetarians begin to communicate via email, electronic bulletin boards and listserves like Dome-L. Jacob posted there and asked for help to make his dream to reality. A number of people in the UK who had corresponded with and met Jacob, became interested in the project. One donated a mobile dome. Another donated a vid-

eo projector and some DVD's.

I wrote to him a couple of times in 2002 and considered going there on a sabbatical. But somehow it just didn't work out and instead I went to Sri Lanka, where I did astronomical outreach with the retired director of the Colombo Planetarium. Jacob's dream of a planetarium in Ghana wasn't yet realized, but it was incubating.

### The Peace Corps

Ghana was a familiar place for me, as I had served there in the U.S. Peace Corps. I spent two years in Liberia and two years in Ghana, during the time period of 1979-1983. The experience taught me much about the rest of the world and prepared me for meeting Jacob 23 years later.

I learned that people are most important and that material prosperity really means little by comparison. It became clear to me that people are basically the same worldwide. Of course, there are differences, but our basic humanity unites us. We are more alike than we are different.

Difficult economic conditions had forced Jacob and his family to leave Ghana by the time I was living there in 1981. But still, Jacob's dream lived on.

In Liberia, I had lived with a family with whom I became so close that they became my family. Over the years I kept in touch with them, visiting them when possible. There was a total solar eclipse passing through Ghana in March of 2006. I considering going to view the eclipse and visit some of my Liberian family who were living in Ghana at the time. However, I felt that I couldn't afford the trip so I decided not to go.

Then, in February 2006, tragedy struck my Liberian family and their youngest son was killed in a traffic accident in Ghana. I felt the necessity to go back for the funeral, whether I

could afford it or not.

While traveling to Liberia, I passed through Ghana and it was on this trip that Jacob and I finally met in person. We watched the total solar eclipse together and had the opportunity to talk for many hours about Jacob's dream of a planetarium. He was so passionate about his dream that he inspired me. That's what dreams do! Jacob passed his dream on to me.

I resolved to try and help him in any way that I could. Once I returned home, at every opportunity I spoke with fellow planetarians and in the process inspired them. Thus, Jacob's dream was passed to others who had never even met him. Still, there was no projector and no planetarium in Ghana. Had the dream failed? Not for Jacob. His dream continued and his enthusiasm did not abate.

In October 2007 the dream suddenly started to happen. With the wonderful coopera-



Ghana Planetarium, Accra, Ghana

tion and work of people in Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Minnesota and Sweden, within a relatively short time period of time, the wheels were set in motion for Jacob's dream to be fulfilled.

In May and June of 2008 I spent 6 weeks in Ghana, helping Jacob to build his planetarium and install the donated projector. In June of 2008 the first public planetarium in West Africa saw first light! Jacob's 30-year dream had become a reality.

Today, Jacob's dream inspires thousands of Ghanaian students. The planetarium may cause them to dream their own personal dreams. Who knows what will become of these dreams, what wonderful things may result in Ghana and in the world as a result of Jacob's dream? ☆

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

- Harriet Tubman