



2025 IMPACT REPORT



Our Mission and Vision



Our Mission is to offer educational programs about science and astronomy for students, the public, and in support of educators.

- *Our purpose is to give the public a place to foster their interest and passion in astronomy and space.*
- *We aim to inspire young people to pursue further education or careers in astronomy or related STEM fields to help meet the growing future demand for individuals in these industries.*
- *We strive to broaden our reach to underserved populations in Sonoma and surrounding counties to provide equitable opportunities to all socioeconomic groups.*

Our Vision is to be recognized as a leading center for public astronomy education in Sonoma County, serving students, families, and the general public.



*We embrace these values
to accomplish our purpose*



From our Executive Director

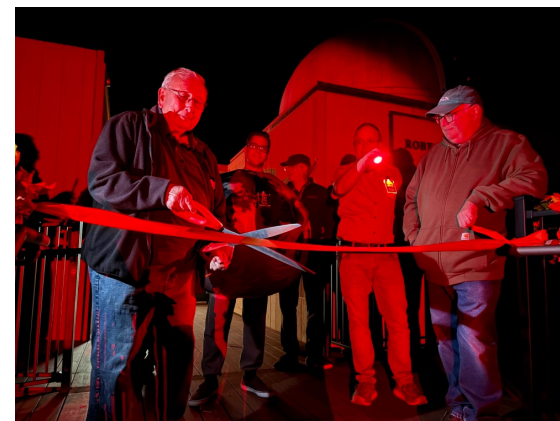


Stephanie Derammelaere
Executive Director
Robert Ferguson Observatory

We had another incredible year at the observatory in 2025 and I am so proud of our amazing volunteer team who worked so diligently to serve almost 10,000 visitors, rebuild our deck, ramps and railings, serve on our board and committees, refurbish telescopes, and so much more. Our most notable change in 2025 was our new look – both internally and externally. We revamped our logo to modernize our branding, and made huge strides on our accessibility improvement project, completely changing the face of our building (more information on page 20 of this report). We also had a few telescope camera upgrades including replacing the color camera and upgrading the guide camera on the RC20 telescope.

We continued with our signature programs and added some new ones as well, including a popular “Cosmos & Cocoa” event. (more information on our new programs is on pages 16 and 17 of this report). We are excited to continue the tradition of adding fun and educational new programs every year, in 2026 adding “Sips and Stars,” “Spooky Skies,” a “Summer Solstice Soirée,” and a “Build your own telescope” class. Last year we also revamped our docent member nights to incorporate fun themes and instill a lively, social atmosphere that was appreciated by all in attendance. Our fall docent member night also included the ribbon cutting of phase 1 of the accessibility improvement project!

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From our Executive Director (cont'd.)

Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

Our Volunteer Coordinator, Joe Caruselle, was promoted to Volunteer and Operations Manager, to better reflect his role. He established technical telescope talks for operators this year and significantly improved our ability to accept, refurbish and appraise telescopes. He also started the SOL (Spanish Outreach and Learning) group to improve accessibility for the Spanish Speaking community. Besides managing our volunteer team, Joe also oversees our Young Astronomers program, is involved in marketing, and plays a pivotal role in our operations.

In 2025 the Robert Ferguson Observatory was able to retain our Platinum Transparency rating on Guidestar, a resource by Candid for information about nonprofit organizations, including data and analysis. The Platinum Seal of Transparency is the highest level of recognition that GuideStar offers. It demonstrates that an organization is sharing information about its goals, strategies, capabilities, achievements, and progress indicators.

Being able to raise funds for a capital improvement project as well as managing funding of our daily operations is not easy for a very small non-profit like RFO, and we would not have been able to survive without the incredible support of our donors and volunteers. It is through their generosity, passion, and commitment that we were able to continue to foster a love of science to inspire future generations and build a brighter tomorrow for all who look to the stars with wonder and awe.

Sincerely,

Programs Provided in 2025



PROGRAM / EVENT	NUMBER OFFERED IN 2025
Public Star Parties	15
Public classes (Focus Nights, Cosmos & Cocoa, Bring Your Own Telescope, etc.)	28
Young Astronomers meetings and events	12
Observación de Estrellas (Spanish-speaking star party)	2
Free events (Solar Observing, Wappo Cultural Gathering, etc.)	11
Family Daytime Program	3
Private off-site events	5
Private events at RFO (mainly for schools and youth groups)	31
Docent / Member Nights	5
Outreach events (science fairs, museum events, etc.)	18
New volunteer training	13
TOTAL NUMBER OF EVENTS IN 2025	143

2025 By the Numbers



9,627
Visitors
Served

Six
Striking
Sparks
Telescopes
Awarded

3,916
Youth
Inspired

254
low-income
families
gained free
admission

An event
offered through
RFO
An average
of every
2.5 Days



Program Evaluation Survey Results



96.3% of respondents stated that they learned something new about science or astronomy during their visit to RFO.

94.5% of respondents stated that their visit inspired them to learn more about space and astronomy.

22.2% respondents came with children and, of those, **72.2%** agreed that the children in their group were inspired to learn more about space and astronomy

90.7% of respondents stated they are likely to return for another event at RFO

Some comments from our visitors

"The lecture at the Observatory was fantastic. What was also a treat was looking through the various telescopes that they had available. I'm addicted"

"I just wanted to say a huge thank-you for an amazing night at the Robert Ferguson Observatory. My kids and I were absolutely blown away by the 40-inch telescope — seeing the Andromeda Galaxy up close was an unforgettable experience! It's hard to put into words how awe-inspiring it was. The telescope is incredible, and we really appreciated the time, effort, and passion that go into making something like that available to the public. My kids haven't stopped talking about it since! Thanks again for sharing such a special experience with us."

"Our group had a fabulous time last night! Thank you to the observatory staff and volunteering for hosting us! The families were thrilled to have a break in the clouds and get to see the beautiful stars in the sky! We appreciate everyone at the Observatory!"

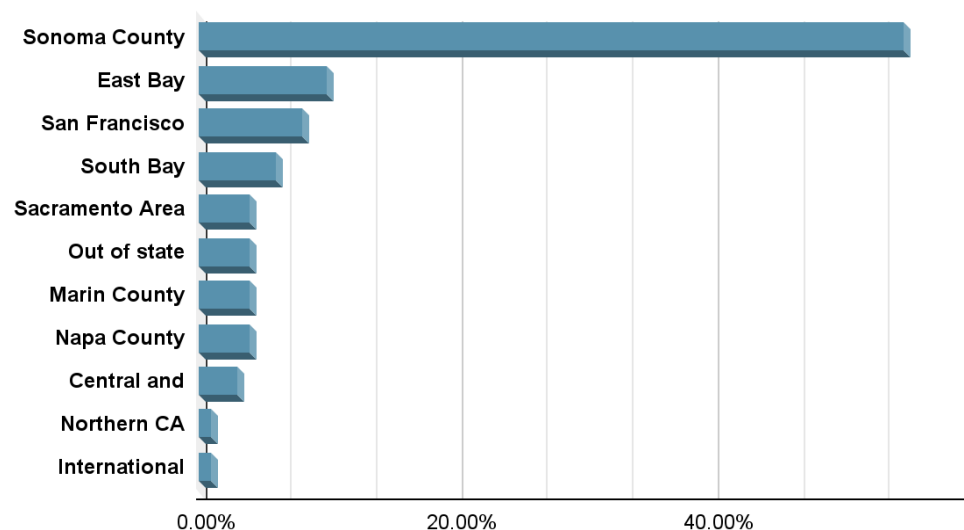
"Just wanted to say thank you so much for such a wonderful field trip! The kids had a blast!"



Where are our visitors from?

This year we did some analysis on where our visitors are coming from. Here are the results!

Where Our Visitors Come From



RFO Volunteers in 2025



- **230 Active Volunteers**
- **7,912 hours volunteered in 2025**
- **63 New Volunteers trained in 2025**
- **52 Volunteers active for more than 5 Years**
- **36 Volunteers active for more than 10 years**



RFO Volunteer Awards in 2025



- **Mikko Bojarsky** – Every year the docents of the Robert Ferguson Observatory nominate and vote on their Docent of the Year. In 2025 the winner was Mikko Bojarsky, a high school science and math teacher at Credo High School in Rohnert Park. A docent since October 2015, Mikko has a Masters in Geoscience from Mississippi State and teaches astronomy on the high school level. In his time at the observatory he volunteered over 870 hours! Mikko usually operates the 8" telescope for many private and public events, dedicated countless hours being the registrar and operating the 8" at the Night Sky Classes, acted as presenter for numerous events, and often managed night sky tours at public star parties.
- **Sam Cena** - Sam was one of the 2025 Sonoma Valley Star Volunteer Award recipients. Sam has faithfully given presentations at almost each public star party every month for over seven years. His riveting topics and ability to answer even the most obscure questions has delighted and educated young and old alike. We are so proud of all his work for the observatory and for his ability to inspire others to learn more about science and astronomy!





From our Board President



Eric McHenry
Board President
Robert Ferguson Observatory

As Board President of the Robert Ferguson Observatory, I am pleased to share highlights from 2025 — a year that demonstrated both the strength of our community and the enduring power of public science education. Throughout the year, RFO continued to welcome thousands of visitors to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park for public star parties, solar observing, lectures, and special programs that make astronomy approachable and inspiring for audiences of all ages. Our volunteers once again formed the heart of this work, generously sharing their time, knowledge, and enthusiasm to help guests experience the night sky firsthand. From first-time stargazers to returning members, RFO remained a place where curiosity is encouraged and science comes alive under the stars.

In 2025, RFO also focused on strengthening our foundation for the future. We invested in our facilities, telescopes, and programs while deepening partnerships that expand our educational reach and improve accessibility. Our commitment to inclusive, high-quality STEM education continued through school programs, youth initiatives, and reduced-cost opportunities for families, ensuring that economic barriers do not limit access to the wonders of astronomy. As we look ahead, RFO is well positioned to grow its impact — advancing scientific literacy, fostering lifelong learning, and inspiring the next generation of explorers. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my sincere thanks to our volunteers, donors, members, and partners who make this work possible and help keep the universe within reach for our community.

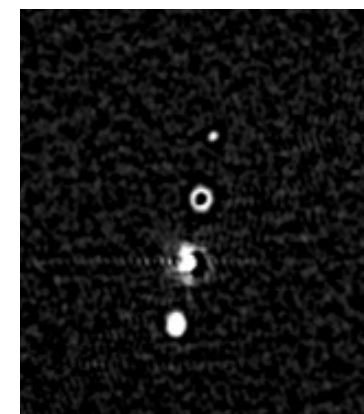
From our Research Committee

In 2025, the RFO Research Committee achieved a transformation of the RFO research program, advancing both scientific capability and educational impact. The committee successfully transitioned the RC20 telescope into a fully automated, research-grade instrument, expanded the range of science that can be conducted at RFO, and established a scalable model for collaborative, publishable research involving students, volunteers, and professional scientists.

The RC20 reached full production status for research imaging through the deployment of the NINA automation platform. End-to-end workflows were implemented, including automated sequencing, autofocus, plate solving, closed-loop slews, and post-sequence calibration. Custom software and standardized procedures now produce fully calibrated, research-ready data products that are automatically stored in imagelib.rfo.org. A formal operator checklist and training process were developed, enabling consistent, repeatable research operations by a growing pool of qualified observers.

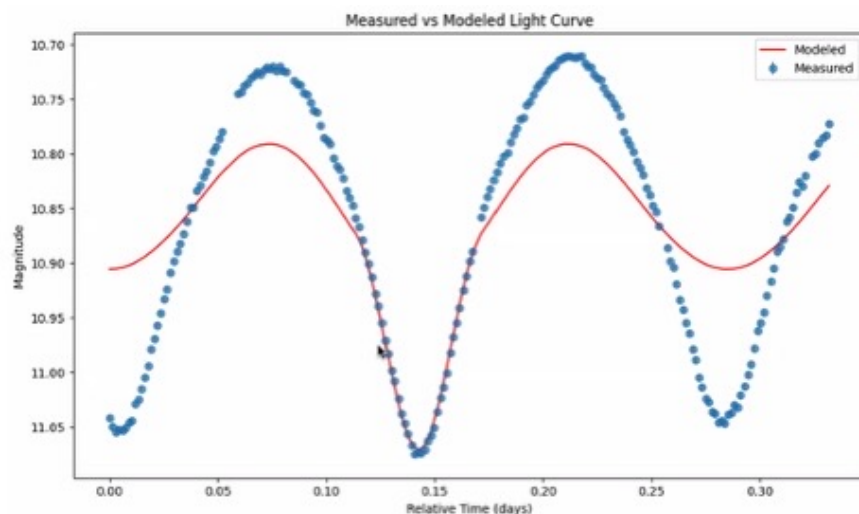
Scientific capabilities at RFO expanded significantly in 2025. The committee launched spectroscopy at RFO with successful first-light observations using a Star Analyzer spectroscope, opening new research avenues beyond photometry. Speckle interferometry was established as a viable technique on the RC20, resolving close double stars previously unobservable with traditional imaging. Photometric transformation coefficients were derived for the RC20, enabling high-quality, standardized BVRI photometry suitable for submission to the AAVSO and for publication.

The Research Committee oversaw multiple active scientific programs with meaningful outputs. These included long-term monitoring of variable stars, detailed studies of eclipsing and contact binaries, RV Tauri variables, supernova photometry, and exoplanet transit observations. Notably, the year-long monitoring of the R Coronae Borealis star Z UMi captured a full decline and recovery event with unusual color behavior, representing a potentially publishable result.



First detection of a close double star using speckle interferometry at RFO from the RC20 telescope.

From our Research Committee – cont'd.



In progress analysis of light curve of V2552 Cyg, an eclipsing contact binary star observed by Ryan McDaniel and analyzed using PHOEBE software by Marek Mierzwinski.

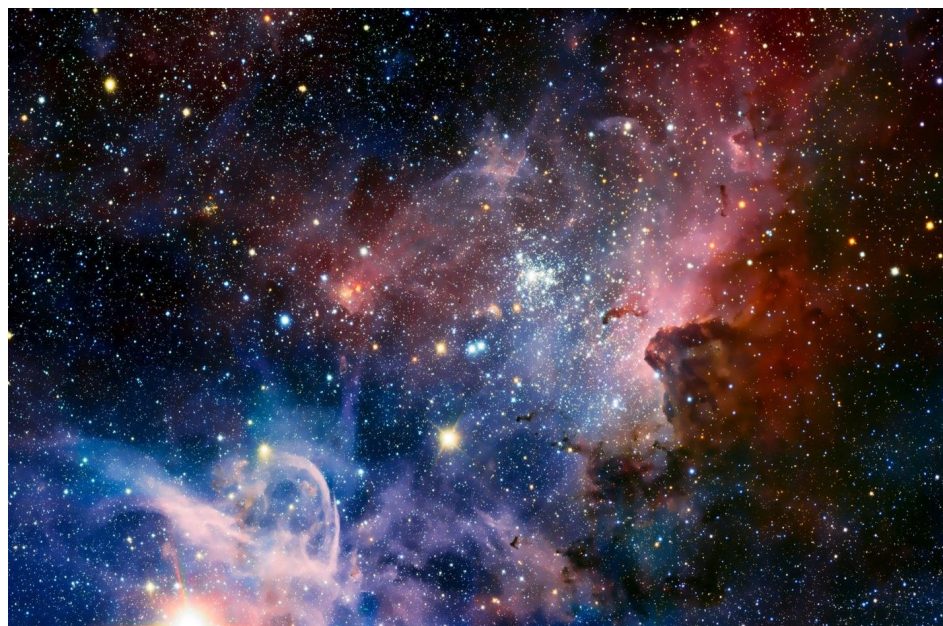
Equally important was the committee's success in integrating student research and education into its scientific mission. High school and college students participated directly in data acquisition, analysis, and paper writing. Several student-led projects progressed to submission or publication in peer-reviewed journals such as JAAVSO and the Journal of Double Star Observers. These efforts demonstrated a repeatable pathway from telescope operation to scientific publication.

Inspired by best practices shared at the Society for Astronomical Sciences conference, the committee formalized a team-based research model built around small groups, defined projects, mentoring, and dedicated writing time. This structure supports participants at varying experience levels and ensures steady progress from observations to results.

By the end of 2025, the Research Committee had established RFO as a productive center for citizen science and student research, with professional-grade instrumentation, reliable workflows, active scientific programs, and a growing research community. The groundwork is now in place for sustained scientific output, expanded collaboration, and increased visibility through publications and conference presentations.

New programs at RFO

Every year we try to add new programs and events that we believe the public would enjoy. In 2025 we piloted several new programs. First, we offered two astrophotography sessions, thanks to RFO Docent Neil Martin, and through the financial support of a donor who contributed to the program in Christine Churchill's memory, former RFO docent and avid astrophotographer. The first 3-part session was **Beginner Deep Sky Astrophotography Processing**, and the second 3-part session was the **Deep Sky Astrophotography Image Capture** class. The classes taught students the fundamentals of deep sky astrophotography, image capture techniques, image processing skills, an introduction to an astronomical image processing program, and more. Due to the financial support, we were also able to offer six scholarships to students in the program!



We also offered a **Cosmic Conversations** program, an interactive evening of exploration and discovery that offered an intimate, small-group experience, with time for questions and in-depth discussions about the observatory and fascinating astronomical topics.

New programs at RFO – cont'd.



Another new program we offered in 2025 was our **Cosmos & Cocoa** event - a fun and cozy, family-friendly evening that combined a docent-led planet walk, a tour of the stars and storytelling with hot chocolate in hand, followed by telescope viewing for the rest of the night. These programs proved to be a perfect chance to explore the cosmos and connect with the night sky for individuals of all ages and star gazing experience.

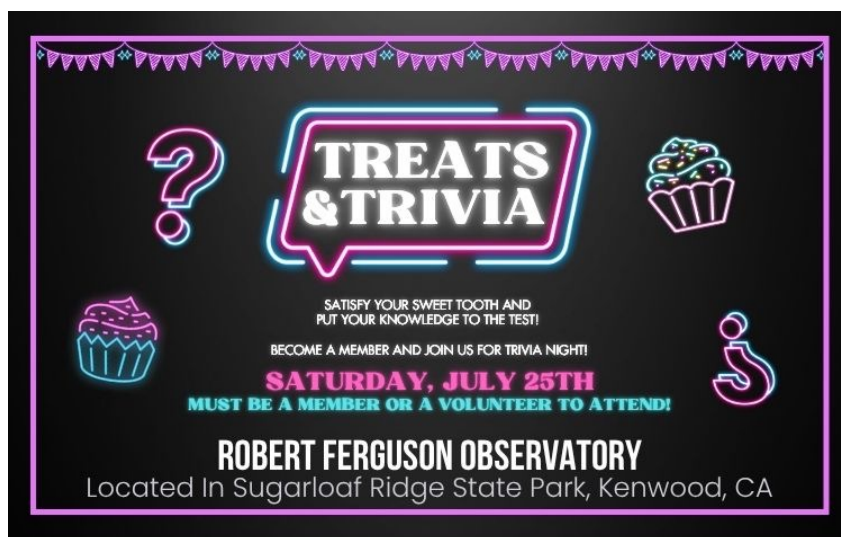


Lastly, we decided to bring back an event we had first offered during Covid – a **Bring your Own Binoculars & Chair** night. This program combined a guided tour into the wonders of the night sky that are visible through common binoculars. We started with a night sky tour outside to learn about constellations and objects visible through binoculars. Unlike during Covid, we could now open up the observatory's telescopes after the outside tour to round out the experience.



Docent and Member Parties

Docent and Member Nights have always been offered at the Robert Ferguson Observatory as a chance for docents and their friends and families to gather in an informal open house-style setting, as well as giving members a free night to look through our telescopes and engage with our docents without battling large crowds. In 2025 we took these nights up a notch, and created theme parties which elevated the fun, education, and all-around social interactions these events strive for. They were very successful and we plan to continue these, and add others, in 2026!



From the Telescope Team



When continually operating several telescopes for trainings, public and private events, and our own research, continuous upgrades and maintenance are par for the course and 2025 was no exception. Thanks to our many dedicated volunteers we have managed to keep all of our sophisticated equipment in tip top shape, including managing a couple of camera upgrades that entailed replacing the color camera and upgrading the guide camera on our RC20 telescope.

Update on Accessibility Improvement Project

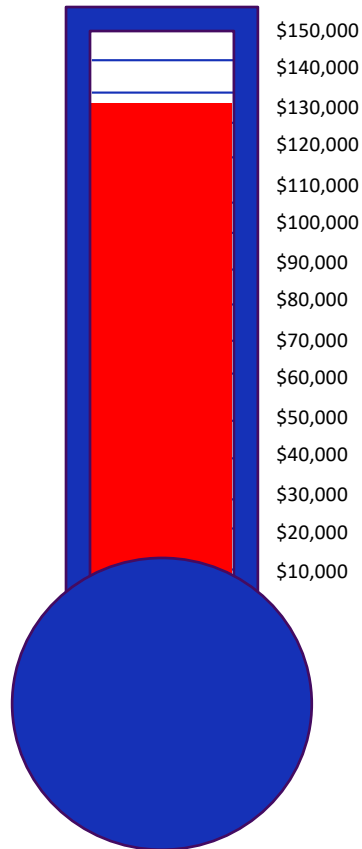


The work to undertake our accessibility improvement project started in early January, 2025, with the Institute of Canine Forensics completing a search for possible human remains around the observatory and RFO waiting for the final approval of the Project Evaluation Form that was submitted to California State Parks in the previous year. Demo and construction finally started in August, 2025.

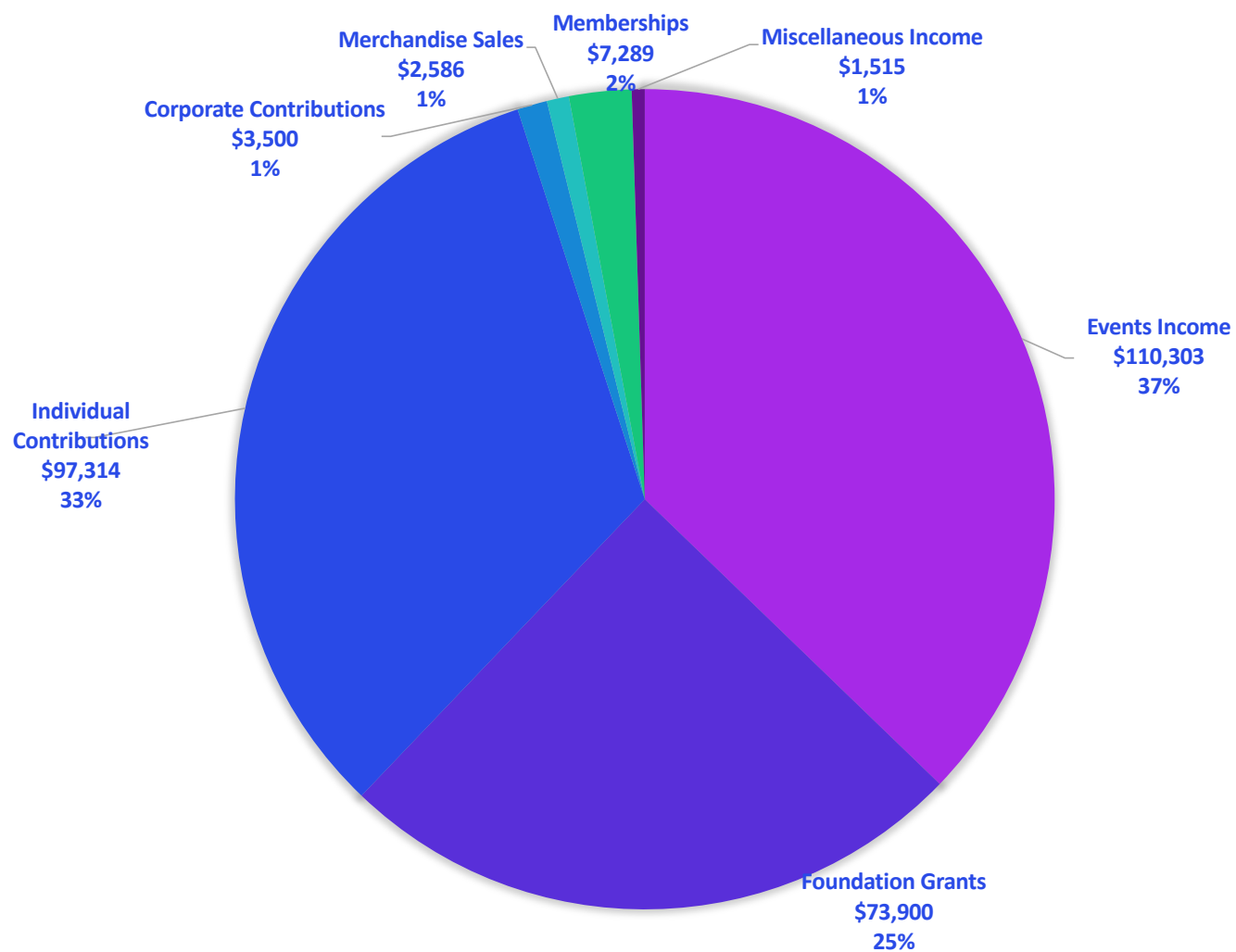
We are so happy to report that phase 1 and 2 are almost complete. The new concrete ADA parking pad and pathway were installed, as well as the new realigned stairway, reconstructed entry landing, and improved and reconstructed 6' wide West Wing ramps and landing. Phase 2 entailed improving and reconstructing 6' wide East Wing ramps and railings, and reconfiguring the entrance to our East Wing room. The remaining work on these phases include painting that needs consistent dry weather before undertaking, and installing red lighting around the decks. The vast majority of all this work was completed by RFO and Sugarloaf park volunteers.

We have already seen the great improvements this work has made in making RFO more accessible and comfortable for all people who wish to enjoy the observatory. Our last and final phase which will be completed as funding allows, entails expanding the Dome Wing to make the space around the 8" telescope more comfortable and inclusive. The existing dome will be replaced with a larger dome to improve telescope operations.

Update on Capital Campaign Funding



We have almost reached our \$150,000 capital campaign goal to complete all three phases of the accessibility improvement project! We just need a bit more to finish phase 3 – expanding our dome wing. Thank you to our many supporters, donors, corporate sponsors, and foundations for your contributions to help make this important safety and accessibility work a reality!



Our Revenue Highlights for 2025

Statement of Financial Position
Robert Ferguson Observatory
As of December 31, 2025



DISTRIBUTION ACCOUNT	TOTAL
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	\$81,463.07
Accounts Receivable	
Accounts Receivable	0.00
Total for Accounts Receivable	\$0.00
Other Current Assets	\$95,394.94
Total for Current Assets	\$176,858.01
Fixed Assets	\$10,967.14
Total for Assets	\$187,825.15
Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	\$3,264.75
Total for Liabilities	\$3,264.75
Equity	
Opening Bal Equity	4,607.33
Perm Restricted Funds	15,000.00
Temp Restricted Funds - Building Maintenance and Improvement	-7.92
Retained Earnings	179,770.66
Net Income	-14,809.67
Total for Equity	\$184,560.40
Total for Liabilities and Equity	\$187,825.15

*Statement
of Financial
Position
for 2025*



Thank you to our 2025 Corporate and Foundation Sponsors



Rotary Club Santa Rosa East West



Rotary Club of Sonoma Valley



Kiwanis Club of Oakmont



Rohnert Park – Cotati Rotary Club

Codding Foundation, Purdom Family Fund, Farley Family Foundation, Heck Foundation, Smart & Final Charitable Foundation



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