

New Staff at ESO



Gerard Van Belle

I joined ESO in September 2007 as the PRIMA Instrument Scientist for the VLTI. Over the years I have had the distinct pleasure to work with a variety of excellent teams on a number of optical interferometry projects, and it seemed a natural step forward to accept an offer to join the PRIMA group in Garching. Previously I had worked on the Keck Interferometer as an instrument architect, and observed extensively with the Palomar Testbed Interferometer, the CHARA Array and the IOTA Array, so joining ESO in this capacity is a welcome new challenge.

PRIMA to me represents the final, full flowering of the first generation of VLTI instruments, and has a real opportunity to showcase the truly unique capabilities – and discoveries – possible only with interferometry. The PRIMA team members, both inside and outside ESO, have been working hard on the project for many years, and I feel a little spoiled join-

ing this talented, friendly group so close to the beginning of commissioning observations, which will take place towards the end of the year. Taming the many and subtle aspects of this facility will be a demanding task, but I expect it to be rewarding in equal measure as we use its unprecedented angular resolution to catch unmatched glimpses of nearby worlds.

The additional challenge of leaving the US West Coast and moving my whole family to lovely Bavaria has presented some unique hurdles, but we are thrilled to have the opportunity to enjoy life in Munich and the surrounding areas in a way that is much more intimate than a tourist sees. Such a big move is always bound to have its painful moments, but we have found no shortage of new friends at ESO and in our new neighbourhood that have helped smooth the transition. My family and I thank all those in Garching and Neufahrn who have been so hospitable to us.

Bodo Ziegler

Since last December I have been enjoying the scientific environment, the instrumental expertise and the cooperative spirit of colleagues at ESO as a new member of the User Support Department. I support programmes conducting observations with the FORS1 and FORS2 spectrographs in all modes (IMG, HIT, LSS, MOS, PMOS, MXU) and with the recently commissioned HAWK-I near-infrared camera. Being the link between users from the general astronomical community and ESO Paranal staff, I try to maximise the scientific return of observing runs for the given instrumental and technical feasibility. Other tasks are related to the ESO survey team that is responsible for an efficient implementation and execution of the public large-scale surveys to be conducted at the new survey telescopes VST and VISTA.

Before joining ESO I was the head of a Junior Research Group supported by the Volkswagen Foundation at the University of Göttingen for almost seven years and temporary professor at the University of Bonn for half a year. Having spent much of my time on administrative issues,

education of students and faculty boards, I now enjoy being closer to instrumentation and observational issues. For me there is a very fruitful interplay between excellent science and expert knowledge of instruments. Most of my research projects focus on galaxy formation and evolution within a cosmological context. The projects provide strong constraints for models like the cold dark matter (CDM) based hierarchical build-up of cosmic structure by measuring the mass evolution, star-formation history and chemical enrichment of galaxies. The observations are mainly achieved with optical spectroscopy, using ESO's very efficient instruments, of distant galaxies out to redshift unity, combined with deep optical/NIR photometry and spatially highly-resolved Hubble Space Telescope imaging. For the interpretation of the results we compare the observational data with N-body/Smoothed Particle Hydrodynamics (SPH) simulations of galaxy evolution considering various interaction phenomena. Targeting not only field galaxies but also groups and clusters, we explore the environmental dependence of galaxy evolution.

Now in the lively community of ESO, I'm looking forward to many fruitful discussions of both scientific and observatory-related issues.



Photo: H. H. Heyer, ESO