

## Social Engagement at ESO

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In 2007 a presentation was made to the Lebenshilfe Freising e.V. ([www.lebenshilfe-fs.de](http://www.lebenshilfe-fs.de)) on the scientific, as well as technical, challenges facing staff working at the ESO observatories in Chile. The non-profit organisation Lebenshilfe e.V. is a social establishment with the organisational goal to promote the development of people with disabilities. This year seven students and two lecturers from the Lebenshilfe e.V. were invited to a presentation at ESO headquarters about the Solar System given by Martin Kümmel (from ST-ECF). As a practical highlight for the students, Gerardo Avila from the ESO Instrumentation Division offered a view of the Sun through the telescope of the AGAPE amateur astronomer's association at ESO headquarters. The young

Photo: E. Janssen, ESO



A group of young people from the Lebenshilfe Freising e.V., together with Michael Böcker and Martin Kümmel from ESO, in front of the AGAPE telescope in Garching.

adults, pictured in the figure above, very much appreciated the informative and interesting afternoon organised by ESO for the end of their school education.

## New Staff at ESO



Antoine Mérand

I grew up in France, where clouds and light pollution rule the sky. My native region (Vendée) in the west, by the Atlantic Ocean, is no exception. I was led

to astronomy at a young age by an uncle who always dreamt about being an astronomer. I received books from him and I clearly remember not seeing Halley's comet through his telescope, in 1986. I was seven years old.

Nevertheless, I bought a telescope as a teenager, and enjoyed too few clear nights, star hopping for the brightest celestial wonders. As a result of the cloudy skies, I started to develop a strong interest in the telescope itself: how it works, how it forms an image, how to align it in order to get the nicest image. I ended up mostly using my telescope to look at non-celestial sources (including street lights).

After high school, I mostly studied mathematics, theoretical physics and computer science. What I enjoyed most were optics and computer science classes,

and whatever in maths and physics that related to optics and computers. I moved to Paris, to attend the physics school *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS). There, I had my first astronomy class, taught at that time by the renowned astrophysicist Pierre Léna. Part of the curriculum at the ENS involved a research project lasting six months. Mine was suggested by Pierre Léna: to work with Steve Ridgway in Tucson (Arizona) on the interpretation of optical interferometry observations of Mira stars. That was my first contact with astronomy, and I was hooked. Everything was enchanting: optical interferometry is complicated and intricate, but I was working first-hand on data very few understood, and the people I worked with were kind, stimulating and challenged me like never before. Arizona was also one of the best places for astronomy and for an amateur the skies were splendid. Using binoculars I saw more globular