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## Children's dream to see stars comes true

By FENG ZHIWEI in Changsha and DU JUAN in Beijing

Xie Tianlei, 11, and his school-mates have a great curiosity about the vast universe, and they have realized their dream of getting closer to space and embracing the beauty of the night's stars thanks to a newly built observatory in their village in Hunan province.

"I want to be an astronomer when I grow up," Xie said during a local TV show late last year about rural development. His words attracted the attention of the host of the show, leading to the building of the observatory.

Even though he lives in a remote rural area, Xie is quite familiar with astronomy.

"It is amazing that there are numerous stars with lots of mysteries in the sky for us to explore," Xie said. Rural children like Xie have the same fascination about the universe as their counterparts in cities.

Touched by the children's desire for knowledge, the TV show's production team decided to invite more groups of people — including astronomers, an architect, investors and the local government — to work together to build an observatory in the village.

Companies have sponsored the construction costs of around 2 million yuan (\$300,000), while architect Wang Qian designed the observatory for free and local governments helped to accelerate the approval process.

Two months later, on Jan 3, the



Primary school students visit the observatory in Xinhe, a village in Hunan province, last week. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

observatory, covering an area of 368 square meters, opened in Xinhe, a village in Xiaochang township of Changsha, becoming the only such observatory built in a village in Hunan. At the inauguration ceremony, Xie was named the honorary chief of the observatory.

Wang said the observatory has four floors, including a library, a multimedia classroom, an interactive zone and an astronomical observatory.

"A professional astronomical telescope with a large aperture was set up on the fourth floor, which can be used for daily planetary monitoring, star cluster observation and the other general functions of astronomy," said Wang Chunqiu, the head of Xinhe village.

As astronomy combines knowledge about mathematics, physics and geography, the observatory has

attracted nearby students from 10 schools and even children from kindergartens.

"This year, professional astronomers from Hunan's astronomical society have come to the observatory more than 10 times to talk with the children and help them observe space," Wang said.

Wang said the observatory has so far attracted around 300,000 visitors this year, which has boosted the surrounding tourism, restaurant and homestay industries.

As the next step, the local government plans to improve the related tourism facilities to attract more people to experience the beauty of the village and the night sky.

*Zhu Youfang contributed to this story.*

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