

comes in from the professional and amateur observatories. Before amateurs are allowed to provide data, they have to demonstrate that they can track an asteroid. They're required to track the same asteroid three different times in two subsequent nights, in order to qualify for registration.

Earlier this year, Martinez took some significant strides to put himself among the hierarchy of amateur astronomers. He also built a structure in his backyard to permanently house his telescope and related computer equipment — no more having to roll his telescope and computer equipment out of the storage shed and onto his patio, which gives him an extra hour to devote to his asteroid tracking.

But as he was putting the finishing touches on the Lenomiya Observatory — MPC H13, he receive confirmation that he had become a Fellow of the Society.

"At the time that I got started in astronomy," he said, "I knew about the Royal Astronomical Society. They've been around since the 1800s, and it has always been my ambition to become a fellow of the society. The membership originally was made up of amateur astronomers, called gentlemen astronomers, but now they're mostly professional with some amateurs, like myself, that have demonstrated that they have made contributions to the field.

"I had to fill out an application with documentation as to my published works in professional publications. You have to qualify, and a member has to recommend you. It's not one of those organizations where you pay a fee, and you're a member."

Martinez explained that astronomy is a very broad field, not unlike becoming a doctor and then choosing a specialty. "You won't find an astronomer that says he does astronomy," he said. "They do deep space, galaxies, dark matter, planetary systems, all specialties. I do asteroids. The fact that they're moving all the time, and the fact that they might impact the earth some day. It's a danger out there, and that's the reason why I like that particular specialty, because the times that I do it, thousands of amateur astronomers are also tracking asteroids, and the data we provide is used by the government.

"Our data is fed to databases like the Minor Planet Center, and they keep data on asteroid positions and photometry, which is the measurement of the intensity of light. That data is available to both government and private researchers,



Alan Levine/Dispatch photo, Luis Martinez spends most of his evenings gazing at the stars in his recently built backyard observatory.



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