

For Immediate Release

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Pioneer Youth Leaders Taking on Dark Sky in Mason

In Mason, the students of the Pioneers Youth Leadership program have taken on Dark Sky Preservation as a focus for sharpening their leadership skills in their community. Working with their teacher Megan Bierschwale, Hill Country Alliance (HCA) Night Sky Program Manager Cliff Kaplan, and HCA Night Sky volunteer and Texas Master Naturalist Bridget Langdale, these students will write newspaper articles, give public presentations, host public star parties, improve the outdoor lighting at their school, and help business owners similarly improve their outdoor lighting. These activities will help preserve the starry skies over Mason for the next generation.

“It’s very exciting to work with these talented, dedicated students,” said Cliff Kaplan of HCA. “They really are ‘pioneers’—the first group of high school students to work on Dark Sky Preservation in an organized way in the Hill Country. I look forward to seeing what they accomplish in Mason and to seeing how their efforts inspire student groups in other Hill Country communities to get involved.”

“It’s so important that we give our young people opportunities to lead,” added Bridget Langdale. “These students and their classmates will be at the helm of our community before we know it. It will be great for all of us if they have some real-world experience working with their community to achieve something tangible like Dark Sky Preservation.”

The article below, written by Mason Pioneers Sydney Anderson and Megan Canfield, describes the beginning of the Pioneer’s work from their perspective.

The Mason Pioneers is an in-school organization created to inspire students to become leaders in their communities. Cliff Kaplan, program manager for the Hill Country Alliance and Bridget Langdale, local proprietress, came and gave a presentation to our Pioneer classes to inform us about our dark skies and the dangers of light pollution.

Light pollution is the brightening of the night sky caused by street lights and other man-made sources. This sends light straight into the sky, affecting the night skies, instead of shining down and directing the light into the area where light is needed. Light pollution causes stars in the night sky to no longer be visible, which is not yet a major problem in Mason, but we learned that it soon could be.

We as Pioneers are now working with Mr. Kaplan, the HCA and the Mason Star Gazers to help slow down the process of light pollution. A few weeks ago the Pioneers and some of the Mason Star Gazers met for a star party at the home of Tommy and Megan Bierschwale. The Pioneers were able to learn about the telescopes, constellations, apps for star-gazers, and much more. The Pioneers will host a star party for the students of Mason High School later this semester. The students were given the opportunity to view the night sky through several different telescopes. The moon, stars, and nebulae were just some of the amazing parts of the sky that were visible. Our goals for the future are to help the HCA and

Mason County with several aspects of the dark skies initiative, which will include educating the students and community on the importance of the night sky and even a business recognition program.

We are planning our own star party for the students of Mason High School. The Pioneers have gained knowledge over a very interesting topic and they want to show the community how lucky we are to have such beautiful night skies and the importance of preserving this great resource.

The Pioneers is a leadership organization under the direction of Megan Bierschwale at Mason High School. This year's Pioneers students are: Sydney Anderson, Whitt Bierschwale, Megan Canfield, Shiloh Dickinson, Brookelyn Doss, Sandra Duarte, Madelyn Heath, Matthew Kerr, Klay Klaerner, Clint Lane, Anna McMillan, Marisela Palacio, Grace Perlichek, Brooke Pozzi, Molly Schwertner, Kason Silerio and Parker Standard.

The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at www.hillcountryalliance.org.

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The Mason Pioneers learning to operate telescopes. Photo: Cliff Kaplan