

NEWS

A good alien is hard to find

By Logan Stack
staff writer
ascn@psu.edu

Ours will be the generation that discovers ET, or so Seth Shostack of the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute said yesterday at his talk at the Reed Union Building. What is "intelligent" life? According to Shostack, "From the standpoint of SETI, "intelligent"

means that they can build a radio transmitter. So turn to your neighbor and ask them if they can build a radio transmitter, and judge them accordingly."

But how likely is it that there's anything out there worth looking for? There are 100 billion stars in our galaxy and about 100 billion galaxies in our universe. "About one in ten of these stars is very much like our sun," Shostack said.

And there's nothing special about our solar system. "If there's anything we've learned from astronomy in the last 500 years, it's that every time we thought we were special, we were wrong," said Shostack.

The SETI project looks for intelligent life by looking for radio signals in the microwave band of the radiation spectrum. There is very little noise on the microwave band so signals stand out. They're listening to 60 million channels, looking for any sort of transmission.

Asking if they're close to finding something is like asking Christopher Columbus if he's close to finding China. There was water today and more water for the last week. But maybe tomorrow he'll see land, maybe not; there's no way to know.

Shostack explained it with a common metaphor: "We're looking for a needle in a haystack. We know how big the haystack is - the number of stars in the Universe. We don't know how many needles there are."

There is good news though: we use computers to analyze the data. Shostack explained, "The speed of the search for ET is doubling every 18 months. It will continue to do that unless the money runs out." Even by conservative estimates, there are about 10,000 intelligent societies in this galaxy. That means we will find one in the next 30 years.

So, if we'll be tuning in to ET's radio within our lifetimes, what will we be hearing? Unfortunately, we don't know anything about who we're listening to. Shostack predicted that we may never figure it out.

Shostack had an interesting prediction for what we'd find when we got there: "The real ET is likely to be machines, not soft, squishy guys." If humans are able to build an intelligent machine, the first thing we would tell it to do would be build a better machine. These machines are able to evolve much faster than we can. They are also theoretically immortal, so a 10,000 year rocket trip to Earth is not so onerous as it would be to the squishy sort, like us.

Shostack will go back to the SETI observatory, hoping he lives long enough to open the celebratory bottle of champagne lying in the refrigerator. "I notice that every time we go to the observatory ... it's a different bottle of champagne," he said.

Attention Seniors

Senior Salute Days

Purchase your Cap and Gown

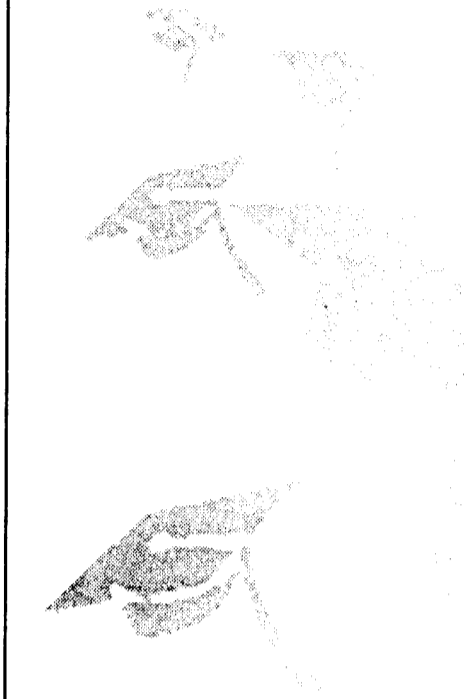
Order your Class Ring

Order Commencement Announcements

Purchase Diploma Frames

Pick up Tickets for the Commencement Ceremony

Stop by the Alumni Table



WHEN: Monday, Oct. 31 ---- 10 a.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Tuesday, Nov. 1 ---- 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

WHERE: Reed Wintergarden

for more information stop by the bookstore

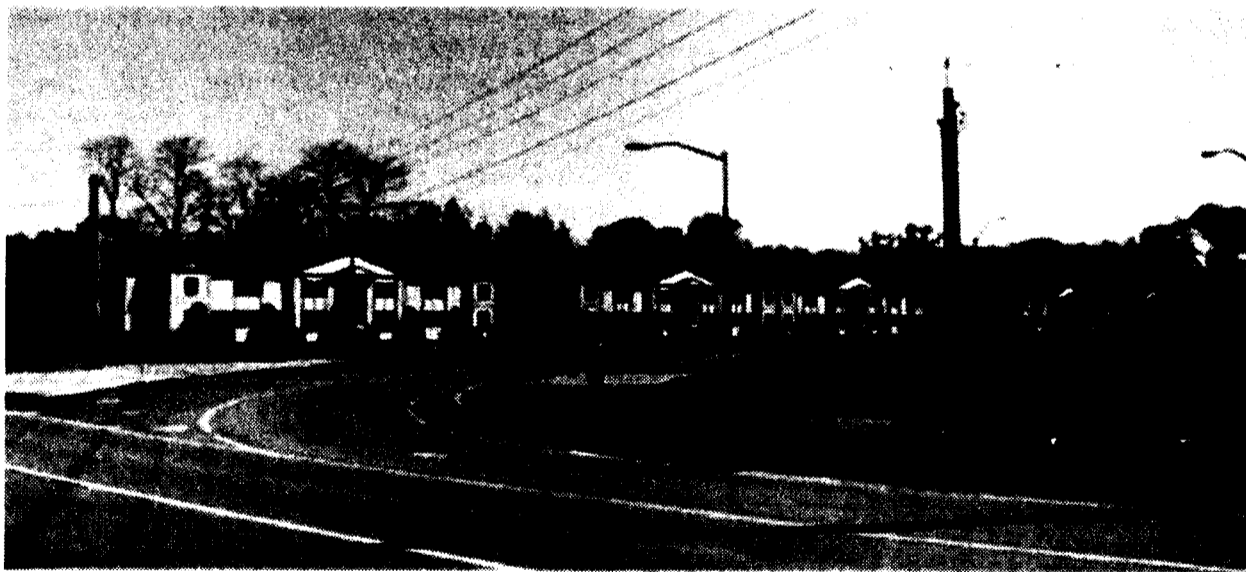
Behrend Briefs

The Celebrate Behrend event will be held on Monday Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. outside of Bruno's. Sophomores will have the opportunity to declare their Behrend Major a semester early and all students will be able to explore hundreds of financial aid options and scholarship opportunities. Students attending will discover how to build resumes and learn about internships, employment, campus involvement and leadership.

Paving will be taking place on Saturday, Oct. 29 beginning at 7 a.m. Areas to be paved include the main road from Eric Hall, past the Glenhill Farmhouse to the Behrend Building walkway. Vehicular passage beyond that point will not be possible. Construction will take place as long as the weather cooperates.

COMING TO PENN STATE BEHREND FOR FALL 2006

UNIVERSITY GATE APARTMENTS NEW OFF-CAMPUS STUDENT LIVING COMMUNITY



Construction Begins this Fall!

Located directly across from the entrance to Penn State Behrend

The New apartments will also offer:

- Furnished Bedrooms & Living Room
- Kitchen, Living Room & 2 Full Baths
- High Speed Internet in Every Bedroom
- Free Parking
- On-site Office & Laundry
- Walking Distance to Class

**Now Pre-Leasing 3 & 4 Bedroom Apartments
Featuring ALL PRIVATE BEDROOMS**

CALL NOW to reserve your apartment for next year

Call (814)899-5160 or E-mail: universitygate@jamesproperties.com