

For Immediate Release: October 4, 2016

Media Contact: Amy Jessee, UNC Asheville Communication & Marketing, 828.250.3853 or ajessee@unca.edu

2016-17 Astronomy Club of Asheville-Carolyn Keefe Scholarship Awarded to UNC Asheville Senior Nathan Kirse

UNC Asheville senior Nathan Kirse has been named the recipient of the Astronomy Club of Asheville-Carolyn Keefe Scholarship. Kirse is a physics major from Winston-Salem with minors in astronomy and computer science.

"The Astronomy Club of Asheville is thrilled to be in a position, for our second year, to contribute to the education of a promising student at UNC Asheville," said Dominic Lesnar, president of the Astronomy Club of Asheville. "In his capacity as Lookout Observatory docent, we've gotten to know Nathan well and he has proved himself to be the type of student our scholarship endeavors to support – bright, dedicated, and curious about the cosmos, all qualities that make Nathan not only an asset to the university, but also to our community."

In addition to his work as a docent, Kirse conducts astronomical research at the Lookout Observatory on campus, which is operated in partnership by UNC Asheville and the Astronomy Club of Asheville. "My research has involved the detection of exoplanets - planets that orbit stars other than our own; an alien planet in essence," said Kirse. "I wanted to detect the known exoplanet WASP-33b but my professor, was skeptical about my ability to do that using Looking Observatory. As it turned out, I was successful.

"This motivated me to attempt to do actual research on *unconfirmed* exoplanets," continued Kirse. "What is so captivating to me about this research is that I am literally dealing with other worlds, potentially just like Earth, right at my fingertips. No other field in science gives you that sense of awe. I would like to go to graduate school for astronomy, and continue doing research in the field. After that, I am not too concerned where I end up, as long as I get to exercise my love for space," said Kirse.

The Astronomy Club of Asheville-Carolyn Keefe Scholarship includes \$1,000 to be applied to the cost of attending UNC Asheville for the upcoming academic year, and a one-year membership in the Astronomy Club of Asheville.

The scholarship is named in honor of the late Carolyn Keefe, who was professor emeritus of English at Lindsey Wilson College and an enthusiastic Astronomy Club member. The Astronomy Club of Asheville is a nonprofit educational organization that is open to visitors and is dedicated to helping people of all ages understand and enjoy astronomy at all levels of interest.

[Lookout Observatory](#) at UNC Asheville offers free monthly guided stargazing sessions for the public. For more information, visit lookoutobservatory.unca.edu or contact Brian Hart in the Department of Physics, rbhart@unca.edu or 828.251.6442.

###