

■ **SCIENCE:** Weather postpones first test launch of stratospheric balloons

Eyes on Northern Sky

KYLE GENNINGS
The Daily Press

Since its opening earlier this year, the Timmins Stratospheric Balloon Research Base has been the subject of excited discussion among area residents speculating about the progress of the work being done at the Victor M. Power Airport.

Luckily, Science Timmins, an organization that has been working with the project since its inception, helped to enhance some of that discussion on Tuesday night by hosting an information session at the Days Inn and putting researcher Jean-Philippe Bernard in the spotlight.

"We are using the base, the airport to launch stratospheric balloons to raise our scientific instruments above most of the atmosphere to have a better look at the sky," said Bernard, a scientist working for the

French space agency (Centre national d'études spatiales) in Toulouse, France. "I am in charge of the PILOT program which will become operational in Timmins next year. For this year we will be focusing on balloon test flights."

The type of experiments that the new facility was built to accommodate will move into full swing next year.

"We will be looking at the sky in wavelengths that we can't see with our eyes," said Bernard. "We will be looking in the infrared, which will show us some very cool things about our atmosphere, in particular we are looking into the interstellar medium."

The interstellar medium is the matter that exists in the space that separates star systems in



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Science Timmins has been working with the Stratospheric Balloon Base project since its inception. Tuesday night they hosted an information session at the Days Inn featuring researcher Jean-Philippe Bernard. Bernard is a researcher from the French space agency (Centre national d'études spatiales) normally based in Toulouse, France.

the galaxy.

"This is the medium between stars in our galaxy," said Bernard. "That medium contains gas and dust and what we want to be observing is the dust and in particular the polarization of that dust."

This study will help scientists the world over further understand the universe our world is nested in.

"We want to study how the light that is coming to us here on earth is polarized," said Bernard. "This is interesting because it is giving us informa-

tion essentially about the magnetic field that exists in this interstellar medium."

Further understanding this polarity will help scientists like Bernard better understand the formation of galaxies.

"That magnetic field is exactly like the magnetic field of the earth, except much weaker," he said. "It is important to study this because it speaks to the circumstances surrounding star formation and all of the structures caused by difusement in the galaxy is caused to some

extent, by these magnetic fields."

While researchers like Bernard are currently testing the balloons here in Timmins, other researchers are testing the valuable read-out equipment overseas.

"We are doing tests on the ground with the instruments right now, back in France," he said. "The tests that we are doing here, launching the balloons is to test the flight chain, which is the chain that connects the testing equipment with the balloon, to make sure

that there are no complications and no issues."

For tests to continue, the weather has to co-operate.

"We were going to launch a balloon last night," said Bernard. "But we had a lot of rain and a lot of weather, we really need to have the best conditions to launch them so that we can monitor them properly."

Which leaves Bernard and his fellow researchers hoping for a break in the weather, but until then, the theoretical work continues.