



# MONTANA LEARNING CENTER

*at Canyon Ferry Lake*



Dear Friend,

As 2023 draws to a close, we want to express our sincere appreciation for your continued support of Montana Learning Center at Canyon Ferry Lake (MLC). We truly could not do all that we do without your support. Every overnight youth camp was booked to capacity, dozens of educators took advantage of our programming to enhance classroom science instruction across the state, and our ongoing community outreach efforts sold out. It is no exaggeration to say that your partnership fueled thousands of successes this year!

Since its inception in 1984 (**40 years ago next year!**), MLC's primary goal has been to enrich the lives of students through scientific inquiry. It is such a blast to see that spark of curiosity ignite a newfound passion, and, over the years, we have had the privilege of seeing that again and again. We are delighted and humbled to know that, out of all the options available each year for summer activities for Montana youth, more than 500 students and their families make their week at MLC a priority. Some of our campers have attended our camps every year since elementary school and now serve as junior counselors at our camps, with plans to pursue a scientific field in college. Your support is quite literally shaping lives!

In addition to offering summer science camps for students, in partnership with Montana State University, we offer programs that strengthen aerospace education in Montana under the auspices of NASA's Northwest Earth & Space Science Pathways. As part of the Pathways program, MLC hosts the Montana Aerospace Scholars (MAS) program, which is a free, aerospace-themed educational program for Montana high school students. Thanks to our recently established partnership with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, MAS program participants have the opportunity to take part in special educational activities at the University, such as learning to fly a plane, and graduates of the MAS program can apply for a scholarship to Embry-Riddle. The Montana Aerospace Scholars Embry-Riddle Prescott Scholarship program awards scholarships to as many as four MAS graduates each year and provides as much as \$5,000 per year to each scholarship recipient, for up to four years.



Our science teacher trainings, which are made possible through your support of MLC, were yet another remarkable success this year, and countless students across the Treasure State will benefit from their teachers' participation in these trainings.

In 2023, we expanded our astrotourism program and hosted seven Beyond the Big Sky events for members of the public: six for summer stargazing and a seventh for October's solar eclipse. Virtually all the events quickly sold out, giving close to 700 people — nearly half of whom came from outside the greater Helena area — the chance to experience the night sky through our state-of-the-art telescopes. We are thrilled to be able to offer such fun and memorable learning opportunities to our community and beyond.

Our observatory is second to none in Montana, with a spectacular view of the night sky, and we love sharing our passion for astronomy through lectures and one-on-one interactions with attendees at these very special events. Our observatories will be even better in 2024, when we add a 28" aperture telescope donated to us by Montana State University.





Finally, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, in 2023, we completed a much-needed kitchen renovation. Our new kitchen allows us to serve healthy, freshly prepared food on-site, which keeps our campers focused and energized for the nearly around-the-clock learning that happens here.

As we continue to expand our offerings to reach more and more people, our needs continue to evolve and change. One of our goals for 2024 is to purchase a 15-passenger van, which would facilitate in-depth field trips, better shuttle our day campers to and from Helena, and allow us to expand our always popular Camp Dinosaur and Camp Extreme Yellowstone. **Right now, every donation will be doubled, up to \$10,000, thanks to a very generous donor's matching gift.**

Another 2024 goal is to acquire a portable planetarium, suitable for use in a gymnasium or other large indoor space, and bring it to communities in Montana that otherwise have no access to astronomical observatories or planetariums. We plan to start with the Helena exurbs (e.g., East Helena, Montana City, Clancy, Boulder, Townsend, etc.) and expand outward from there.

As you may know, we are committed to ensuring that finances are never a barrier to attending our programs. As interest in our premier science education grows, so do the number of scholarship applicants. We would like to continue to expand our summer camp scholarship program in 2024 to enable more low-income students than ever before to attend our camps.

**Would you consider supporting us in one or more of these endeavors?** Gifts can be made to MLC by mail or through our website, [www.montanalearning.org](http://www.montanalearning.org). Recurring gifts or planned gifts, such as a bequest in your will or trust, have an even greater impact. If that is of interest to you, please contact me by phone or email to discuss the available options.

Thank you again for your amazing support. You are making a broad and lasting impact on our students and our state. If you haven't had a chance to attend one of our outreach programs, we encourage you to join us. Keep an eye on your email inbox and Facebook feeds for upcoming events. We would love to have the chance to say thank you in person.

Sincerely,

Executive Director  
Montana Learning Center

