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### College Joins Thousands In Search For Life In Space

From: Stig Agermose <[stig.agermose@get2net.dk](mailto:stig.agermose@get2net.dk)>  
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Stig

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College joins thousands in search for life in space

By PAUL BRINKLEY-ROGERS  
Herald Staff Writer

As of noon on Thursday, Paul Perone's personal computer at Broward Community College had not detected an alien civilization.

But every now and then, he could not resist checking the screen, looking for a sign that something in deep space was beaming a radio message at planet Earth.

"You see a spike," he said, referring to sudden blips on a multicolored bar graph, "and you say, 'Wow!' Am I being contacted by an alien?"

One week ago, the power of 50 PCs at BCC was harnessed as part of the SETI@home program coordinated by the University of California in Berkeley. It is an international search for alien intelligence.

Since the project was announced in May, 89 campuses and more than 600,000 individual PC owners in 205 nations have enrolled in the effort. The University of Florida is the other Florida school working with the program. U.S. campuses involved include the likes of Harvard, Purdue, Duke, Carnegie Mellon, Georgia Tech and the University of Texas at Austin.

Anyone with a home computer and a connection to the Internet can join.

Instead of PCs just gobbling up electrical power when they are idle, the SETI@home program can enlist a legion of computers to help analyze raw data on signals beamed at earth, said Perone, BCC's special projects coordinator.

Chances are exceedingly small that a desktop or laptop computer at BCC may actually detect a meaningful radio signal from blocks

of data forwarded by the coordinators of SETI, which stands for "Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence." The universe is full of naturally occurring radio sounds.

But the possibility -- however remote -- of detecting a message is tantalizing, as evidenced by the flood of campuses and individuals downloading the software from SETI@home that makes them a part of the quest. More than 30 million personal computers are believed to have access to the Internet, SETI directors say.

"There is a small but captivating possibility that your computer will detect the faint murmur of a civilization beyond Earth," the SETI@home homepage

<http://Setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu>

says in explaining its mission. The program, designed for both Windows and Macintosh users, takes about five minutes to download.

SETI@home, which developed the idea of enrolling idle PCs to boost its own limited resources, is part of a larger project called SERENDIP -- or Search for Extraterrestrial Radio Emissions from Nearby Developed Intelligent Populations. The project gathers and records raw data accumulated by the world's largest radio telescope at Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico.

Perone said the BCC computers are, in effect, borrowed by SETI@home during their down time.

"Mine does it every time I walk away for five minutes," Perone said, referring to the SETI software that springs to life when his PC is not being used. "A screen saver pops up." The PC goes to work analyzing raw data from Arecibo, a continuously moving, multicolored bar graph indicating radio signal strength.

"That data is then relayed back to Arecibo," he said. "The PC user is aiding research and will be notified if anything of an alien nature flares up. Anyone participating has the opportunity to be the first earthling to discover new life and new civilizations."

He said the SETI organizers pledge that if something turns up the user of the PC that makes the discovery will be the first to know.

The SETI@home effort will take data gleaned from all the sky visible from Arecibo three times over in a two-year period. SETI experts say it may take decades to sift and find even one alien radio transmission amid all the naturally occurring radio noise beamed at earth.

The SETI software has been installed on 50 computers in the Learning Resource Center on the central campus, said Ken Libutti, BCC education technology supervisor.

The school hopes to eventually involve as many as 200 of its PCs.

#### COMMUNICATING WITH ALIENS?

Go to the SETI@home Web page --

<http://Setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu>

Download the program -- which takes about five minutes.

Get the free computer screen saver that will analyze relatively small chunks of data when computers are idle.

You're ready.

\*Contact Us

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