

# Stars Align for New Outreach Scientist

*The student has become the teacher, quite literally, as a former ISSYP attendee helps run that program and others as Perimeter's newest educational outreach scientist.*

Perimeter's Educational Outreach department recently welcomed a new face – well, sort of.

Stephanie Keating joined the Perimeter team as an educational outreach scientist in December, but her hiring marked something of a return. Back in 2003, she attended the first International Summer School for Young Physicists (ISSYP), Perimeter's showcase program for top high school students.

In those early days, ISSYP was known as YPC, or Young Physicists of Canada. Though the program now welcomes 20 Canadian and 20 international students each summer, only the homegrown half participated in that inaugural year.

Still, many of the hallmarks that have come to define ISSYP were already in place. Over two weeks, alongside likeminded peers (some of whom she's still in contact with today), Keating was exposed to real research with Perimeter scientists and given opportunities to explore the field's observational side.

That year, the group attended Starfest, Canada's largest annual amateur astronomy conference and star party, which takes place near Mount Forest and attracts hundreds of astronomy enthusiasts from Ontario, neighbouring provinces, and the US.

Keating describes the ISSYP experience as her "first really deep immersion into physics." It was followed by a semester at the Ontario Science Centre Science School. Though she had diverse interests growing up – from drama and photography to math and science – her love of physics flourished after her brief time at Perimeter.

"When my mother and grandmother picked me up, I said to them, 'It would be so cool to work here one day,'" says Keating.

She went on to study astronomy and astrophysics, completing bachelor's and master's degrees at Western University and a PhD at the University of Toronto. During her master's, she got involved with teaching and outreach, and found she had an affinity for it. At Toronto, she ran tutorials for a popular first-year introductory astronomy class for non-science students, working with a professor who was more concerned with instilling an appreciation for science than with the memorization of facts. It's a philosophy that fits seamlessly with the Perimeter approach.

By the time she'd finished her PhD, Keating had decided a research career was not for her and was exploring a range of different options, from science policy to software development to data science. Then, while in France with her partner, she received an email from her mother about an outreach opening at Perimeter.

"I hadn't seen it," says Keating. "She said, 'You should apply.' Because she knows how much fun I had."

She got the job. The Perimeter Keating has returned to is drastically different than the one she attended in high school, when the Institute still operated out of an old post office with an iconic clock tower on King Street.

Back then, she had probably envisioned coming back to Perimeter as a researcher, but she's thrilled to return in an outreach capacity.

"It's a real pleasure to be able to take the things that I did, sort of in my spare time when I was a grad student, and do it to the full capacity that you can, with support behind you," she says. "I really, really enjoy that."

– Mike Brown

