

SETI's telescopes to go back online, resuming hunt for alien life

August 10 2011, By Deborah Netburn

This week the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute announced that it had raised more than \$200,000 from a crowd-sourced fundraising effort that launched earlier this spring. The money, which came from just over 2,000 people who want to keep the search for alien life alive, will help the institute put its Allen Telescope Array back online.

"We are so grateful to our donors," said Tom Pierson, who co-founded the [SETI Institute](#) with Jill Tarter (the inspiration for Jodie Foster's character in "Contact.") "We believe we will be back on the air in September."

On the Setistars.org website, where the call for donations was originally placed, large red type proclaims: "Thank You for Your Support to Resume the Search!"

The [Allen Telescope Array](#), or ATA, is a series of 42 linked radio-telescope dishes funded by a \$30 million gift from Microsoft Corp. co-founder Paul Allen. Built at the Hat Creek Radio Observatory in a valley near [Mount Shasta](#), Calif., it is the first group of [radio telescopes](#) built from the ground up with the intention of being used full time to monitor the universe for [radio waves](#) that would indicate there is life on planets beyond our own.

The ATA has been monitoring the universe consistently since 2008, but in April of this year, SETI and its partner, the Radio Astronomy Lab of

the University of California, Berkeley, ran out of money and had to put the ATA into hibernation mode.

That's when SETI turned to earthlings via their Internet, to see if they could help raise money to put the array back online.

So far, 2,276 of them have responded and the institute met its fundraising goal with days to spare. (Pierson notes that the institute is happy to collect additional donations).

Of course, \$200,000 isn't enough to fund a project of this scope, and Pierson said SETI is in negotiations with the U.S. Air Force to continue to collect information on [orbital debris](#). By charging for that service, SETI may be able to earn enough money to keep listening for signs of life.

As to whether valuable time was lost in the four months that the ATA was offline, Pierson said it's hard to say. "You never know when or if a signal is going to be detected, so if you miss a few months, how important is that? It's impossible to know," he said. "We view this mission as one of profound importance, answering man's most fundamental questions - are we alone? Being off air is something we needed to fix."

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