

Cornell's Arecibo telescope threatened by budget cuts

Observatory faces study that could shut it down

By Danica Coto
The Associated Press

ARECIBO, Puerto Rico — Engineers will travel to this Puerto Rican coastal town in coming weeks to study whether to shut down the world's largest radio telescope, which was featured in the movie "Contact" but now faces steep budget cuts, observatory officials said Thursday. Owned by the National Science Foundation and operated by Cornell University, the

Arecibo telescope, a 1,000-foot-wide dish set in a sinkhole amid forested hills; bounces radio waves off asteroids and charts their location, speed and course. It has recorded a number of scientific discoveries since it opened in 1963, including the first planets beyond the solar system and lakes of hydrocarbons on Saturn's moon Titan. But fears that it could face extinction began late last year, when a panel commissioned by the National Science Foundation, a U.S. federal agency, called for deep budget cuts and said officials should consider eliminating it entirely at the end of the decade. Observatory officials said Thursday the impending study

does not mean the complex will close entirely — at least not immediately.

"That's not our desire. But we are looking at this for planning purposes," said Richard Barvainis, program manager of the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center, which includes the Arecibo observatory.

The Arecibo telescope appeared in "Contact," a 1997 Jodie Foster movie based on the book by the late Cornell astronomer Carl Sagan about the search for extraterrestrial life. It also gained fame in the 1995 James Bond movie "Goldeneye," in which the telescope's platform, suspended like a giant steel spider 450 feet above the dish, figured

in a climactic fight scene.

The telescope's budget will plummet from \$10.5 million this year to \$4 million by 2010, Barvainis said, with the savings going to construct a telescope 20 times more powerful, perhaps in Australia or South Africa. The Arecibo facility is receiving a makeover to persuade federal officials to keep it open, including a \$2.5 million paint job to keep its steel structure from corroding in the humid Caribbean air.

Officials said that regardless of what happens with the possible budget cuts, the telescope's visitor center, which draws about 120,000 people a year, would remain open.



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The superstructure up top and the dish below are the primary instruments of the world's largest radio telescope, near Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Teams of engineers will visit the 44-year-old space observatory, run by the U.S. National Science Foundation and Cornell University, this summer to estimate costs of shutting it down, officials said.

Former West Danby dairy farm enjoying equine renaissance

The former Todd family dairy farm on Valley View Road in West Danby has always been one of the town's show-case farms. Built circa 1808 across from the early Baptist church and cemetery, the 105-acre property features a beautiful white colonial-style two-story farmhouse with a pillared front porch.

Two towering silver maple trees, well more than 100 years old, dominate a spacious front yard that is separated from pasture and crop lands by a rustic wood split-rail fence. The bright red barn housed a herd of 45 registered Holsteins renowned for their high production of quality milk. Milton Todd, the



BILL HUTTUNEN
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bought it had to be someone special. Enter Ann Michel and Phil Wilde.

These two Cornell graduates proved to be an answer to prayer. Michel, a horse aficionado originally from New York City, studied mathematics at Cornell and was on the school's polo team. She fell in love with Tompkins County's rugged landscape of forests, ponds and open fields and saw the farm as an opportunity to raise polo ponies and prolong her lifelong love of the sport.

"Phil and I met with Milton in 1988 to discuss the purchase of his farm. He was very concerned that whoever bought the farm would continue to raise animals and harvest the crops," Michel said. The meeting bore fruit, and shortly thereafter Michel and Wilde became only the second owners of this landmark farm in a park-like setting.

The couple remodeled the barn's interior and removed the cow stations and replaced them with stalls to accommodate the seven polo



are in great health; we're looking forward to more foals being born," Michel said.

Standing atop the farms' long driveway, a horse by her side, Michel smiles as she watches the sun shining through the branches of a weeping willow tree next to the barn. "Milton told us he had a bull named Lester and one day Lester was tied to the willow tree. The tree was 8 feet in diameter. Well, after a while, Milton heard the bull bellowing and when he went to investigate, he saw that Lester had pulled the tree out of the ground, an amazing story," Michel said. "No bull."

Meadowgate open house a great success

The May 5 open house and barn dedication at Meadowgate Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation facility in Newfield was a huge success, said founder Pam Watros. More than 100 people attended the event.

"I want to thank everyone that took the time to come and see what Meadowgate is about," Watros said. "We received several do-