

Sussex Astronomy Centre

Naming Stars

One of the most commonly questions I get e-mail about is naming stars. I am usually asked how to go about getting a star named after a loved one or child, living or deceased. Most seem to be under the impression that there are internationally recognised commercial services that will register a star name, for a fee, on someone's behalf which will, consequently, "officially" appear on star charts, or directories,

The sad truth is that this is not so. Whilst there are commercial services that do offer to register a star name and issue a certificate, on a person's behalf, for a fee, the only official body which can give names to stars and other astronomical objects is the International Astronomical Union (IAU). The IAU do not register star names for any individual, other than the astronomer who discovers it. All official names have to be adopted by the IAU.

There are rules which have to be followed when officially naming stars. Traditional names for the brighter stars have their origins in old Arabic names. Some bright stars have either numbers or Greek letters assigned to them. Other stars are generally referred to by a catalogue number. There are a few stars which are named after individual astronomers. This is in honour of an astronomer's work relating to that particular star.

My advice is not to take such organisations seriously, and remember any name given by these organisations bears no authority and will not be used by astronomers.

Better still, save your money, and honour your loved one in some other way. **Simply put, it is just a scam!**

Many people have been extremely disappointed to find that the star that "named after them" is extremely obscure and cannot be seen by the naked eye, and, consequently, they are unable to locate it in the night sky. This is because virtually all, if not all, the naked eye stars already have proper names. It may be, even, that your star is in the opposite hemisphere to where you live, which means you may not be able to see "your star" at all, even with a big telescope, unless you travel great distances! Another source of disappointment is to find out that "your star" is not listed in new astronomy books, or is unknown by astronomers when visiting planetariums or observatories.

The International Astronomical Union has asked astronomers not to further the activities of such firms.