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Space & Science

## Marijuana fans mix with space fans at The Goodship Company's Seattle SETI salon

BY **ALAN BOYLE** on February 10, 2017 at 5:19 pm



SETI astronomer Seth Shostak (far left) takes questions from the audience while The Goodship Company's art director, Greg Lundgren, looks on. GeekWire's Alan Boyle is the guy with his head down in the front row. (Goodship Photo / Ben Lindbloom)

Is Seattle's [Goodship Higher Education Series](#) about bringing together cannabis users? Or is it about deep subjects like the search for extraterrestrial intelligence? And is it OK to ask fellow attendees if they're toasted?

The answer, apparently, is yes, yes and yes.

As SETI astronomer Seth Shostak and I were chatting before Thursday night's talk at Melrose Market Studios in Seattle's Capitol Hill district, we wondered how many folks in the standing-room-only crowd had arrived "pre-boarded."

In The Goodship Company's parlance, pre-boarding means getting high before sitting in on the event, an activity that's in

line with the Seattle venture's main business of selling cannabis-laced edibles.

Goodship founder Jody Hall told me she sees the Higher Education Series as "TED talks with pot" – a social alternative to the TV-watching, game-playing, music-listening or chip-eating marathons that are stereotypically associated with stoners.



One of the audience members works on intricate doodles during astronomer Seth Shostak's talk, which was titled "Where Are the Extraterrestrials?" (Goodship Photo / Ben Lindbloom)

Shostak and I mused out loud about the etiquette of asking people whether they were under the influence. And just then, Laurel Cleveland, creative director for the [Vela Community](#) pot shop in SoDo, stepped up from behind and set us straight: Yes, it's OK to ask. And yes, she was toasted.

Cleveland said the Goodship events provide a social get-together for the cannabis community in Seattle, where state law allows the discreet use of marijuana and its mood-altering derivatives. "I think the community aspect is what drives people together," she said.

But the night's subject matter got her thinking about a different kind of community as well: "It can't just be us," she said – adding that when she referred to "us," she meant global humanity.

Inside the hall, you might not have even realized that you were at a pot-friendly event. Alcoholic drinks were served, and The Goodship laid out free samples of cookies, chocolate bars and pastille candies. But the labeling made clear that the samples contained "NO THC."

"Because that would be illegal," a sign helpfully offered.



The Goodship Company put out samples of cookies, chocolate bars and pastille candies, but made clear that none of them contained cannabis-based additives. (GeekWire Photo / Alan Boyle)

Outside the hall, beyond the organizers' control, it was a slightly different story. It's [against the law to tok](#) up publicly in Washington state. Nevertheless, you could catch a faint whiff of marijuana in the Capitol Hill air.

Virtually every person we spoke with before the event had some connection to the pot industry. "This is one of the only cool events where people get out as a group who socially smoke instead of drink," said Katie Roux of [Dockside Cannabis](#).

Another attendee, who declined to give her name but said she was in marijuana sales, told us that pot was the perfect accompaniment for an evening discussion of aliens. "Using cannabis can aid one in delivering a greater awareness of connectedness that can extend out beyond," she said, in a tone that made clear that the "beyond" she had in mind was farther away than Tukwila.

Does pot make a difference at a science-themed soiree? Maybe so: The attendees seemed a little more willing to make eye contact and give a welcoming nod to a stranger. Shostak's jokes seemed to get somewhat bigger laughs. And at the end of the evening, the astronomer acknowledged that the audience seems more "enthusiastic" than usual, although the intimate setting may have had more to do with that.



SETI astronomer Seth Shostak talks about the search for extraterrestrial life at a Goodship Higher Education Series lecture. (Goodship Photo / Ben Lindbloom)

When the subject is the search for aliens, it's hard *not* to be engaged, right? And Shostak, who's the senior astronomer at the [SETI Institute](#) in Silicon Valley as well as the host of the "[Big Picture Science Radio Show](#)," knows how to hold a crowd's attention.

We covered the main threads of Shostak's SETI talk [a couple of days ago](#), but here are a few of Thursday night's bon mots (or should I say "bon pots?"):

- Based on an extrapolation of our own technologies, the first intelligent aliens we meet are most likely to be machines with artificial superintelligence. "I think that may be part of the reason why the universe seems so quiet," Shostak said. "Machines don't need to talk to us. You probably don't talk to the ants in your back yard. If you do, get help."
- If Shostak ever did get the chance to communicate with aliens, he'd want to ask two big questions: Do you have music? And do you have religion? "If they too had religion, believed in God and so forth, I would find that a very interesting thing to know," he said. "It does suggest one reason to come here ... and that is to proselytize. Think about it: That motivated a lot of exploration on Earth, right?"
- How does Shostak define intelligent life? "I get that question fairly frequently ... you know, is there intelligence on Earth. People make that joke. The way we define intelligence, it's just an operational definition. If you can build a radio transmitter, you're intelligent. That's it. So ask the guy next to you: Can you build a radio transmitter? Then you'll know how to treat him."
- What about the idea that we'll make ourselves more intelligent by [putting super-smart AI chips in our brains](#)? Shostak doesn't think much about the prospects of a human-machine merger. "In the end, I think it's sort of like putting a four-cylinder engine in a horse," he said. "Very quickly you'd say, 'Look, can we get rid of the horse part?'"
- Shostak acknowledged that he spends a lot of time thinking about a deep subject – specifically, are we alone in the universe? But he doesn't think that gives him any better insight into the meaning of life. "It'd be great if it were true, but I don't think it is," he said. "You might as well ask the guy sitting next to you at Denny's."

*The Goodship Higher Education Series presents lectures on a quarterly basis, and the talks tend to sell out quickly. They're presented in partnership with [The Stranger and the Cloud Room](#). For advance word about the next lecture, [join The Goodship's mailing list](#).*

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