Several recent events have me thinking of the night sky. I saw the full moon rise through the trees at home. I watch bright stars and the glow of Orlando late at night when I cannot sleep. And more recently, street lights behind my house in a new subdivision light up my yard and shine in my windows.

Night lighting or lack of it was the focus of the recent Dark Sky Festival at Harmony. The festival was designed to allow visitors to enjoy the darkness in the growing community near Holopaw and increase awareness of the issue of light pollution and lighting design for safety and security as well as for reduced wildlife impacts.

Area astronomy clubs visit Harmony several times a month since it is close to the Orlando urban area, but the night sky is still dark enough to allow some spectacular star watching, with binoculars or a telescope. Harmony designers have taken the lead in reducing unwanted upward lighting that contributes to light pollution and reduces the darkness of the night sky. They have selected fixtures that are shielded to direct light down, instead of up or out, where it is hazardous or not needed.

Harmony has adopted lighting policies for its town center as well as its housing areas and high school to minimize light trespass, light that goes outside the area that it is needed.

Their dark sky friendly lighting reduces unwanted impacts on nocturnal creatures, those that are active at night, as well as reduces disturbance to thousands of migratory birds that use natural night lighting from the stars and the moon to navigate. And they are saving energy and community members' money lighting only targeted areas where and when light is needed.

According to the International Dark-Sky Association, good lighting is good quality light that is where it is needed, when it is needed, without glare. You have likely seen some examples of lighting problems in town. Have you seen a gas station blocks before you get to it because the lights are so bright? You may have noticed accent lights that shine into your eyes while driving. Instead of illuminating the sidewalk for nighttime diners, parking area lights pierce the eyes of drivers with their brightness. You can pick out the location of a school stadium by the bright lights high in the sky and you can use the glow on the horizon as a compass.

Do your part to minimize light pollution and the urban glow and turn off outside lights when they are not needed. Use a motion sensor to trigger lighting when it is needed such as when you take the garbage out at night or to see who is approaching the door.

Commonly used security lighting is generally high wattage floodlights. High wattage means brightness to some but also means more glare and high energy use. Select shielded fixtures that minimize up lighting and allow you to aim light down instead of out into neighboring windows. While do it yourselfers build shields of sheet metal, new fixtures can be found with shields that allow better light control.

Compact fluorescent lighting is an energy saving option for floodlights for consumers while low pressure sodium shielded fixtures are the most energy saving outdoor lighting choice for commercial applications. Businesses such as car lots needing accurate color rendering often enhance the low pressure sodium with some additional white light sources. Proper design is important since light output that is too high causes harsh shadows and glare, considered less desirable from a safety perspective. Energy efficient lights that are too bright or in poorly designed fixtures are still a problem.

Land development codes (LDC's) determine construction standards for new buildings and developments. Osceola County has been requiring dark sky friendly lighting for commercial properties for a while, but has not jumped to requiring the same for residential developments. At this point, dark-sky friendly lighting in communities, such as Harmony, is a voluntary program.

The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) holds an annual recognition program for outstanding developments
and commercial projects that implement dark sky friendly lighting. They recently announced that they were working with the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA) to develop a model lighting ordinance to help municipalities who are interested in addressing lighting issues in their codes. The model code should be available in early 2007 and will be useful whether for voluntary implementation by new developments or for revision of our local land development codes.

The importance of a dark night sky increases as we continue to grow and light up more of our landscape. Numerous information sheets and newsletters as well as lists of International Dark-Sky Association approved lighting fixtures are available on the IDA website Here. If you prefer to call them in Tuscon, AZ at 520-293-3198, don't forget the time difference.

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