

## Light pollution forces world-class comet spotter from Placer

Machholz discovers 12th comet and is Arizona-bound

BY GUS THOMSON  
OF THE AUBURN JOURNAL

Don Machholz has beaten the robots again.

But he's making a tactical retreat because of billboards.

Scanning the morning sky Nov. 7, the Colfax amateur astronomer spotted a new comet.

For Machholz, the discovery of Comet 2018V1 (Machholz-Fujikawa-Iwamoto) came after eight years and 746 hours

• SEE COMETS PAGE A5



COURTESY PHOTO

Don Machholz is leaving Colfax for Arizona — days after his 12th comet discovery.

## COMET:

continued from A1

of probing the heavens in increasingly brighter sky caused by light pollution.

The new comet discovery is the 12th for Machholz. Eight of them have come over the past 29 years he has lived in Colfax.

Machholz uses high-power binoculars and is a throwback to a time before technology allowed automated searches that rely on constant photography to pinpoint the first changes that indicate a comet.

For Machholz, the discovery marks his swansong in Colfax.

The world-record holder for telescopic comet discoveries is moving to Arizona and the north state community of Wikieup.

The amount of light being generated from human sources on the ground has played a big role in the move, Machholz said.

Astronomers need as close to pitch-black

conditions as possible to train their telescopes on night skies. Over the past three decades, Machholz said that those conditions have deteriorated in the area he lives, partly because of the increase in lighted billboards off Interstate 80 near his observatory and home.

Northern Arizona offers a darker sky and a higher elevation — moving him away from the terrestrial dust of lower levels.

Machholz is packing up his astronomy gear but will leave behind an observatory as he lists his home for sale in the next month.

An observatory is perhaps not going to be the biggest sales point for many homebuyers, he admits.

"I could see it probably being repurposed — maybe for hot-tub," Machholz said.

Machholz shares the comet's name with Japanese observers Shigehisa Fujikawa and Masayuki Iwamoto, who sighted the comet at about the same time.