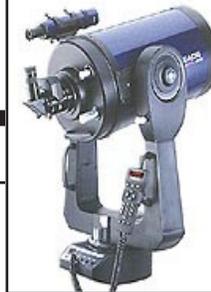


The OBSERVER

The Newsletter of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, Inc.

December 2005 Volume 30, Number 12



President's Message

~ Kal Kumar ~

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Dear Friends,

As we enter the sixth year of this new millennium, let us take some time to reflect on our lives and on life around us. 2005 has been an emotional year for us all. Our club lost President Lyle V. Rich this summer, and our country has faced significant challenges due to natural disasters earlier this year. It has also been a year full of exciting events. We must acknowledge the advances made in astronomy and the forays into space that feed us with more information about the celestial objects that we observe on a weekly basis. Recently, two new moons were discovered around Pluto and the launch of the Venus Express will provide us with exciting new images of our neighboring planet. NASA's Deep Impact mission that released an impactor probe onto the surface of Comet 9P/Tempel 1 could provide us with important information about the origin of the solar system.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all members and readers season's greetings, and I hope that 2006 brings peace and prosperity to us all. I encourage you to continue your passion for observing the night's sky, and to join us regularly at our scheduled observing sessions.

I would like to close with this quote from Calvin Coolidge, "Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas." Season's Greetings and Happy Stargazing.

TCAA Holiday Party Friday, December 9, 7-10 p.m.

The TCAA's traditional winter holiday party (Saturnalia?) will be held on Friday, December 9, at Sugar Grove Nature Center from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. Angela Smith has agreed to allow the TCAA membership to use the Nature Center's classroom to hold this informal event at no charge to the club. While the number who will turn out for this event is unknown, we suspect that all those who do attend will have a good time meeting other club members, and sharing their enjoyment of astronomy. If the sky is clear, we'll be certain to have the Sugar Grove Observatory open for periodic viewing.

Because this is a "no host" event, *all TCAAers who will be attending are urged to bring both refreshments and treats to share.* If anyone has a source

TCAA Calendar of Events

December 9: TCAA Holiday Party, 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. Sugar Grove Nature Center, bring drinks and treats to share!

December 24 - January 2: Key holder training by request (Contact William Carney)

January 7, 14, 21, and 28: Astronomy Course at SGNC, \$30 materials fee, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Advance registration required by January 1.

January 28, Members Only Observing Session, SGO, 7:00 p.m.

February 11: Annual Meeting at Illinois State University

The Observer

Newsletter of the TCAA, Inc.

The Observer is a monthly publication of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, Inc., a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization of amateur astronomers interested in studying astronomy and sharing their hobby with the public.

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Rebecca Wenning Submissions
21 Grandview Dr. must be
Normal, IL 61761 received by
309-454-4164 the end of
rwennin@ilstu.edu each month.

Membership Dues

Individual Adult/Family \$40
Full-time Student/Senior \$25

To join the TCAA, send your name, contact info, and dues payment to:

Duane Yockey
508 Normal Avenue
Normal, IL 61761

of music to liven up the event, then please bring that along too. If you own astronomy resources that you haven't quite been able to understand or get to work, then bring those along as well. The resources might prove to be the origin of a lively and informative conversation. If you have pictures to show, they too will be greatly appreciated.

In the event of inclement weather (e.g., 6 inches of snow) or if you get lost on the way out to SGNC, feel free to call Carl Wenning on his cell phone at (309) 830-4085. A map and driving directions to Sugar Grove can be found on the TCAA web site at <http://twincityamateurastronomers.org>.

If you are unable to attend, may the joy and peace of this holiday season be yours throughout the coming year.

Astronomy Course at SGNC Begins January 7, 2006

~ Reservations due by January 1 ~

Make plans now to participate in a 5-part observational astronomy course to be held at Sugar Grove Nature Center on four consecutive Saturday evenings during January. The course is intended primarily for adults, but is open to minors 12 years of age and older with accompanying adult. The focus of this astronomy course will be on how, when, where, and what to look for in the night sky. This course will be taught by the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, and will include visits to the Sugar Grove Observatory and the Illinois State University Planetarium.

The classes will take place on January 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2006. There will be numerous hands-on activities beginning at 7:00 p.m. and continuing through 9:00 p.m. each evening. Observing will take place at the Sugar Grove Observatory following each class, clear sky prevailing. A supplemental 90-minute visit to the Illinois State University Planetarium will take place

on Sunday evening, January 8 from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

While the instructional component of the course will be free, a \$30 per person registration fee will be collected the first night of class. This fee includes a Nature Center facility usage charge, admission to the ISU Planetarium, and materials. The main themes of the course will be constellation study and an introduction to the celestial sphere (session 1), the solar system (session 2), deep space objects (session 3), and telescopes & observing programs (session 4). Adults (age 18 and older) completing this course who are or choose to become members of the TCAA and take and pass a certification test will become Sugar Grove Observatory key holders upon payment of the required \$10 key holder fee.

Registration for this course is required, and may be completed by contacting Sugar Grove Nature Center by phone (309) 874-2174 or e-mail sugargrovec@earthlink.net by January 1, 2006. Let us know the names of all participants in your party. Fees will be collected at the first class.

Things to remember for this course:

- Your interest might be the deciding factor to run this program! Please try to register by January 1 by phone or e-mail. Waiting until the last minute to register might result in this program being canceled due to low enrollment or missing out because it is full.
- Last minute on site registration will NOT be accepted. Materials for this course must be prepared prior to the first class. Materials will not be available for those who fail to register in advance.
- If you are uncertain about whether or not a class will be held due to inclement weather, call Carl's cell phone 1 to 2 hours prior to class at (309) 830-4085.
- Observing with telescopes can take

place only if the sky is reasonably free of clouds. In the event of an entirely overcast sky, the observing session will be cancelled but the class will continue as scheduled.

- Please dress very warmly, including a hat and gloves. Observing sessions are outdoor events, and you will get very cold standing in line to observe. Only the Nature Center will be heated.
- Please be very careful when driving into and out of the Sugar Grove Nature Center parking lot. Many times there are people walking from place to place in the dark.
- You may bring along a flashlight if you wish, but be certain to cover the lens with a red filter so that observers' dark adaptation won't be adversely affected.

General Meeting Minutes for November 12, 2005

~ Carl Wenning, Secretary Pro Tem ~

Following the above planetarium event, members attended a 30-minute general meeting at Panera Bread Company in Bloomington beginning at 5:30 p.m. In attendance were Sharon MacDonald, Duane Yockey, Josh & Ken Eckhardt, Carl Wenning, Brian Barling, Sheri Rodgers, Dan and Chris Miller, and the Rogers-Memken family (Mike, Jean, Benjamin, Sarah, and Jonathan). In the absence of our



president, Mike Rogers conducted the meeting. The following matters were addressed:

- There was a brief discussion about the Annual Meeting and the associated banquet on February 11. It was agreed that holding the banquet at ISU was an excellent idea given our prior experiences with the Catering Club, but that the space for the pending presentation needs to be more classroom like. Jean Memken will see to reservations and find a better room for our guest speaker's presentation.
- Promotion of the banquet presentation was discussed. It was noted that it is difficult to get significant coverage for TCAA events in *The Pantagraph* other than in the "GO" section. Better avenues for promotion will have to be used to get the word out about this event.
- The idea of a holiday party was discussed, with a general consensus reached that one should be held again this year, possibly on December 3 at SGNC. Carl Wenning will investigate whether or not this will be possible, and will get back with the Board about SGNC use policies and availability. Members should watch *The OBSERVER* for details.
- An election was then held to fill the position on the Board left open by Lyle Rich's untimely death. Following a call for nominations, it was unanimously agreed that Brian Barling should fill the unexpired portion of the open position. The Board will, at its next meeting on Thursday, December 1, decide which positions he will fill on the Board and among the officerships. Currently Kal Kumar is President, Mike Rogers Secretary, Duane Yockey Treasurer, and William Carney 5th Director.

Minutes of December 1, 2005 TCAA Board Meeting ~ Michael Rogers, Secretary ~

The Board of Directors met at the offices of Lewis, Yockey & Brown on December 1, 2005. In attendance were President Kal Kumar, Vice-President Brian Barling, Treasurer Duane Yockey, Director William Carney, Secretary Michael Rogers, and Carl Wenning. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. Our newest board member, Brian Barling, was welcomed to the Board with a loud round of applause. The minutes were approved as published in *The OBSERVER*.

Duane reminded everyone of the NCRA convention to be held April 21-22, 2006, in Appleton, Wisconsin. It promises to be a particularly interesting meeting, and the Board hopes that many TCAAers will attend. Michael had previously posted a promo for the convention on the web site, and will be pass an informational DVD on to Carl.

In his role as ALCor, Duane received a mailing about a "Sky Quality Meter" that quantifies light pollution. Michael immediately suggested we buy several, but it was decided to seek out some reviews, first. William reported that the computer at the SGO is not compatible with the wireless network, and that he would send an appeal out to the list, asking for a donation of a replacement computer.

It was decided to reschedule the TCAA social on either the 9th or 10th, depending on interest. Michael speculated that a phrase exhorting astronomers to "disprove the stereotype that astronomers are anti-social" might convince more to show up. Carl will ask Angela Smith if we can use the SGNC on either of those nights, and then e-mail the list to see who's interested.

Carl will set dates for the January-March Members Only Observing Sessions (MOOSs). The Public Observing Session (POS) schedules

are ready for distribution, and will be sent to members in the March edition of *The OBSERVER*.

Next, discussion of the February Banquet (February 11, 2006) ensued. Michael noted that our keynote speaker, Dr. Roger Phillips, Director of the McDonnell Center for the Space Sciences, is looking forward to sharing his discoveries with the TCAA at the banquet. He is heavily involved in the exploration of Mars, Venus and Mercury (including NASA's newest probe, MESSENGER), and his talk promises to be extremely exciting (and, at the same time, accessible). Michael will bring munchies for the social hour. He noted that pricing probably will be \$10, and it was suggested that a \$15 late-registration rate be set to encourage people to get their reservations in early. Michael will prepare advertising and publicity; he is currently awaiting Dr. Phillips' abstract of his talk. Once a brochure/flier is written, Michael will send a copy to Carl, who will in turn ask ISU Publicity to help spread the word.

Related to publicity, Michael will send a copy of the newly revised Science Letter to Teachers to Duane. It was hoped that anyone who has contact with science teachers would contact Michael, so that we can better get the

word out to schools about field trips to the Sugar Grove Observatory. Michael will send a note about this to the list.

Carl reminded the Board that the Adult Education Program will be taking place in January with the following topics by date: January 7, Stars & Constellations; January 14, Solar System; January 21, Deep Space Objects; and January 28, Telescopes. Details have already been published in a previous edition of *The OBSERVER*, but it is hoped that members will participate.

A brief discussion of Astronomy Day — April 16, 2006 — transpired. It was noted that the new College Hills Mall does not really have a suitable indoor location, so Duane will attempt to book our traditional location, Eastland Mall.

On membership issues, Michael volunteered to redo the New Member Packets, and would work with Jean on crafting a survey on member wants/needs/complaints. Michael will send brochures to Carl and Kal, both of whom are running low. Michael has been working with a company called Facts-On-The-Back to design a new T-shirt for the club, and will be sending FOTB a copy of our logo.

It was decided that consideration of a TCAA retreat topics for such a retreat (e.g., a 2nd observatory) should be postponed until the next Board was in place.

It was decided to create a new membership category for those interested in receiving an electronic version of the newsletter as well an electronic monthly sky map: fees will be \$35 for individual adults and families, and \$20 for students/seniors.

Carl noted that Tom Willmitch, the ISU Planetarium Director, still didn't have an answering machine. Michael asked why he couldn't just use ISU's voice-mail, and Carl said he would investigate.

Carl and Michael will get together, sometime, to check out the LX-200 12" with some high(er) quality eyepieces.

Finally, the meeting ended as all good meetings do, with a pun, when it was suggested that plans for an SGO warm-up room be put on the back burner. The meeting adjourned at 6:19 PM.

Planetarium Event Successful

On Saturday, November 12, eighteen TCAA members attended the presentation of "Ring World" given by Tom Willmitch at the ISU Planetarium. The presentation was in recognition and thanks to the TCAA and its many benefactors who donated part of nearly \$3,000 as part of a recent planetarium fund-raising campaign.

In attendance were Chris Franklin, Sharon MacDonald, Duane Yockey, Mr. & Mrs. Jim Steidinger, Josh & Ken Eckhardt, Carl Wenning, Brian Barling, the Rogers-Memken family (Mike, Jean, Benjamin, Sarah, and Jonathan), Sheri Rodgers, Dan and Chris Miller, and of course our host and TCAA member Tom Willmitch.

While Tom did arrive about 15 minutes late for the event, this was understandable in light of the fact that he had had a cardiac pacemaker implanted only about a week before! Thanks, Tom, for going the extra mile to be with us. ☺

Last E/PO Events of 2005

The public observing session for Mars on November 5 was clouded out and therefore cancelled. The 7:00 p.m. follow-up session on Monday, November 7, got off to a slow start with but 6 members of the general public in attendance. A fast-moving cloud bank covered Mars by around 7:15 p.m. A sort sky talk by Carl Wenning was presented to four visitors. Thanks to Mike and Jonathan Rogers, Dan and Chris Miller, and William Carney for being setting up telescopes for observations.

Make a date with

StarDate

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WGLT, 89.1 FM

Weekdays @ 6:58 AM & 6:58 PM

Sponsored by the TCAA

Partners in Astronomy Education
with the ISU Planetarium

@
309-438-5007

TCAA Treasurer's Report – November 2005

OPERATING FUND BALANCE – October 31, 2005 - \$ 1,326.67

Income

Matt Hughes (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 40.00
Orlyn Edge (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 25.00
M. A. Griffith (Dues) -	\$ 40.00
Bak M. Lee (Sen. Dues) -	\$ 25.00
Angela Bray (Dues) -	\$ 40.00
Maria Jazo-Harris (Dues) -	\$ 40.00

Expenses

Rebecca Wenning (The OBSERVER, October) -	\$ 63.05
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OPERATING FUND BALANCE – November 30, 2005 - \$ 1,473.62

OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – October 31, 2005 - \$ 1,083.89

Income

None -	\$ 0.00
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Expenses

None -	\$ 0.00
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OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – November 30, 2005 - \$ 1,083.89

TOTAL TCAA FUNDS – November 30, 2005 - \$ 2,557.51

Respectfully submitted,
L. Duane Yockey, Treasurer

Tom Willmitch had a group of approximately 85 observing at the planetarium that same night, and wasn't affected by the clouds. In attendance were students from physics courses as well as a few members of the general public. He was assisted by the ISU Physics Club.

It should be noted that 2005 has been a very good year as far as education/public outreach (E/PO) events are concerned. Most of our public observing sessions have been held under tolerably clear skies, our sessions at the Bloomington Public Library have been well attended, and our special events such as Astronomy Day at the mall, Autumn Celebration at SGNC, Mars observing at the Challenger Learning Center on October 29th, our Annual Meeting at ISU with David Williams, and the visit by David Levy have all contributed to making 2005 very successful. Thanks to all who contributed to make this year significant in the history of the club.

SGO Key Holders Take Note: Renewal Fee Due

SGO key holders take note. Now is the time to renew your key holder status for 2006 by sending \$5 to our esteemed Treasurer, Duane Yockey. After the initial \$10 fee, there is an annual \$5 fee for continuing your privileges of using the club's observatory.

Listing of Official Key Holders (Paid \$10 deposit/\$5 renewal)

Duane Yockey (April 2001/renewed through 2005)

Michael Rogers (August 2001/renewed through 2005)

William Carney (March 2002/renewed through 2005)

Carl Wenning (January 2004/renewed through 2006)

Brian Barling (February 2004/renewed through 2005)

Lenore Trainor (December 2004/renewed through 2005)

Kal Kumar (February 2005?)

Kevin Brown (May 2005)

Sothilingam family (June 2005)

Christopher Franklin (July 2005)

Plan Now for Important Future TCAA Events

Mark your calendar and make both plans and arrangements now to participate in the following TCAA events during 2006:

- January 7, 14, 21, and 28, Adult Education Course at SGNC
- February 11, Annual Meeting of the TCAA to be held at ISU
- April 1, first public observing session for 2006 at SGNC
- April 16, Astronomy Day display at local mall (tentative)
- April 21-22, TCAA road trip to NCRAL convention in Appleton, Wisconsin

Magazine Subscriptions

~ by William Carney ~

TCAA members can subscribe to *Astronomy* and *Sky & Telescope* magazines for reduced rates. *Sky & Telescope* is available for \$32.95 per year, and *Astronomy* for \$34.00 per year if subscriptions are purchased through official club channels.

If you would like to subscribe to either or both magazines, send a check or money order made payable to William Carney in the correct amount. Please include one or two 37-cent postage stamps if either is a new subscription. If renewing, then

the publishers usually send a stamped envelope. Send that envelope plus your mailing label or renewal form to William at P.O. Box 52, Bloomington, IL 61702.

Property Manager Notes

~ William Carney ~

The computer at SGO is dated and we need a new one. The current computer has a 300 Mhz central processing unit with 64 megabytes of RAM and a 4.1 gigabyte hard drive. That is not really good enough to handle Windows XP that we need in order to use the recently installed wireless network connection at SGO. Does anyone have a newer computer to donate? A donation would be tax deductible, and would be greatly appreciated. We would need at least a 500 Mhz or better CPU with 128 megabytes of RAM minimum and USB 2.0. Anything less will just drag way too much. Please contact me at willcarney@aol.com if you'd like to speak about a donation.

I'll be available to conduct key holder training for the Sugar Grove Observatory over Christmas break. I'll be able to train interested individuals any time between December 24, 2005 and January 2, 2006. The only thing we'll need is a clear sky. Again, e-mail me at the above address, or phone me at 309-829-7748.

Observing Updates

The following individuals are currently working on observing awards available through the Astronomical League. The list below tells who is



working on what observing award, and how far they have gotten. This, hopefully, will provide incentive for those intrepid observers, and perhaps inspiration for armchair amateur astronomers.

Messier Award

Jean Memken 10
Michael Rogers 10

Herschel Award

William Carney 48
Carl Wenning 21
Brian Barling 180

Asteroid Award

William Carney 04

Comet Award

William Carney 03

If you are working on an observing award and want to gain fame and serve as an inspiration to your colleagues, please e-mail *The OBSERVER* editor Rebecca Wenning at rwennin@ilstu.edu. If you want advice on how to choose an observing list to work on, feel free to ask at an observing session or e-mail our Yahoo group.

MOOS Dates For 2006 Set

Members Only Observing Sessions for 2006 have been set as follows (times represent the end of civil twilight at which time observing sessions normally will start; note that no MOOS will start before 7:00 p.m.):

January 28, 5:38 p.m. CST
February 25, 6:10 p.m. CST
March 25, 6:41 p.m. CST
April 29, 8:19 p.m. CDT
May 27, 8:49 p.m. CDT
June 24, 9:04 p.m. CDT
July 22, 8:52 p.m. CDT
August 19, 8:17 p.m. CDT
September 23, 7:19 p.m. CDT

October 21, 6:35 p.m. CST
November 18, 5:06 p.m. CST
December 16, 5:01 p.m. CST

Electronic TCAA Memberships

Effective January 1, 2006, the TCAA will make available "electronic memberships" at a \$5 savings over regular memberships. Individuals who elect to take an electronic membership will not receive "hard copies" of *The OBSERVER* and the Abrams Planetarium *Sky Calendar*. Such members will receive e-mail notification that a PDF version of the newsletter is available on the TCAA web site, and encouraged to download a monthly star chart at skymaps.com.

Around the Planetarium

~ Tom Willmitch ~

The Illinois State University Planetarium is pleased to present its holiday show *'Tis the Season*, running the first three weekends of December. *'Tis the Season* recounts the historical, religious, and cultural rituals practiced during the time of winter solstice - not only Christian and Jewish, but also Egyptian, Roman, Pagan, Celtic, Nordic, and Hopi. The program also takes a look at some of our more light-hearted seasonal traditions: from gift giving and kissing under the mistletoe to songs about lords a-leaping and ladies dancing.

Running December 2 through December 17, show times for *'Tis the Season* are 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and at 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$2 for children ages 5-12, and \$1.50 for children ages 3-4. Friends of the Planetarium are admitted free of charge. Tickets may be purchased in the Planetarium Gift Shop, next to the Planetarium, beginning 20 minutes before each show.

The Illinois State University Planetarium is also pleased to present a special free showing of *The Stellar Tapestry* at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 6. Among the stars are woven the imaginary shapes of brave heroes and terrifying monsters. Handed down from ancient times, these mythological figures form the basis of our modern constellations. Discover the secrets of their past and explore the myths that thread throughout this stellar tapestry. On-campus telescope viewing of the Moon and planets will precede the program, weather permitting. So be sure to arrive early if the skies are clear.

The ISU Planetarium is located under the white domed roof at the East End of Felmley Hall of Science. Felmley Hall is located at the intersection of School Street and College Avenue on the northeast corner of the ISU campus. Free parking is available for the Planetarium's public shows a short distance north of the ISU Planetarium in University parking lot F-67, located on the east side of School Street. For more information about these and other happenings at the ISU Planetarium, you may also call the Planetarium's Skyline at (309) 438-5007.



TCAA



Welcome New Members:

M. A. Griffith

Bak M. Lee

Angela Bray

Maria Jazo-Harris



The OBSERVER

Newsletter of the TCAA, Inc.

Rebecca Wenning, Editor
21 Grandview Drive
Normal, IL 61761-4071

Are Your Dues Due?

The Dues Blues?

If you see a check in the box above, it means your dues are due. To retain membership, please send your dues renewal to our esteemed Treasurer:

Duane Yockey
508 Normal Avenue
Normal, IL 61761