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## TCAA OBSERVATIONAL ASTRONOMY COURSE REGISTRATION DEADLINE JANUARY 5

Make plans now to participate in a 3-part observational astronomy course to be held at Sugar Grove Nature Center on three successive Saturday evenings during January. The course is intended primarily for adults, but is open to youths 12 years of age and older with an accompanying adult. The main themes of the course will be solar system objects, deep space objects, and how to use a telescope. Those wishing to learn how to use their own telescopes may bring them along to obtain specialized instruction after class.

The lead instructor will be Carl Wenning, former director at the ISU Planetarium (1978-2001). Other qualified members of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers will assist with the teaching of this course, and help those who bring

along their own telescopes learn how to use them.

Classes will take place on three successive Saturday evenings, January 13, 20, and 27, 2007. Class activities begin at 7:00 p.m. sharp and will continue through 9:00 p.m. each evening even if the sky is cloudy. In the event of inclement weather or poor road conditions, the class will be postponed. Phone Carl between 5 and 6 p.m. at (309) 830-4085 if road and weather conditions are of concern.

A supplemental telescope observing session will take place following each class if the sky is clear. Members of the astronomy club will assist with observing sessions, and will help instruct class members in the use of their own telescopes – so bring yours along if you have one.

A registration and materials

fee will be collected the first night of class. The fee is \$20 per person for the general public, and \$17 for members of SGNC. If no instructional materials are desired, the fees will be \$13 and \$10 respectively.

Registration for this course is required, and may be completed by contacting Sugar Grove Nature Center by phone at (309) 874-2174 or email at sugargrovec@earthlink.net by January 5, 2007. Let us know the names of all participants in your party, and whether or not materials are desired. Fees will be collected at the first class. Register early if you wish to attend. Last year the course filled to overflowing, and at least 10 individuals had to be turned away.

## SATURNALIA PARTY A PLEASURE

Those in attendance at the TCAA Saturnalia Celebration on Saturday, December 9, had a pleasurable time. Starting at 7:00 p.m. and running until 10:40 p.m., ten TCAAers had a festive time at SGNC. The evening consisted of music, munchies, and lively conversations. The pleasant weather and clear sky permitted a bit of observing at SGO as well. A formal round of introductions was held in the nature center, and newer members and guests had a chance to get to know some of the "old hands." Bob Snyder has just

recently joined the TCAA, and attending with him was Jodi Brodbeck. Ginny Underwood and Gail Nalsen were in attendance, both having attended the TCAA Adult Education program last January, and a number of public and members only observing sessions since that time. The old hands consisted of Lee Green, Duane Yockey, William Carney, Chris and Dan Miller, and Carl Wenning. Also participating in the festivities was the SGNC "mouser" Daisy who seemed to relish the attention provided by partygoers.

While everyone brought treats to share, Lee brought along two older model PC computers that he had checked out after obtaining them from Dan. These were put on loan to William Carney and Carl Wenning as an "early Christmas present." Both will use these computers to drive their telescopes, thanks to Dan and Lee.

We were all sorry that more TCAAers didn't take advantage of what is becoming a fun-filled annual event.

*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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Submission deadline is the first of each month.

### Membership Dues

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

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

Duane Yockey  
508 Normal Avenue  
Normal, IL 61761

## VENUS ENTERS EVENING SKY

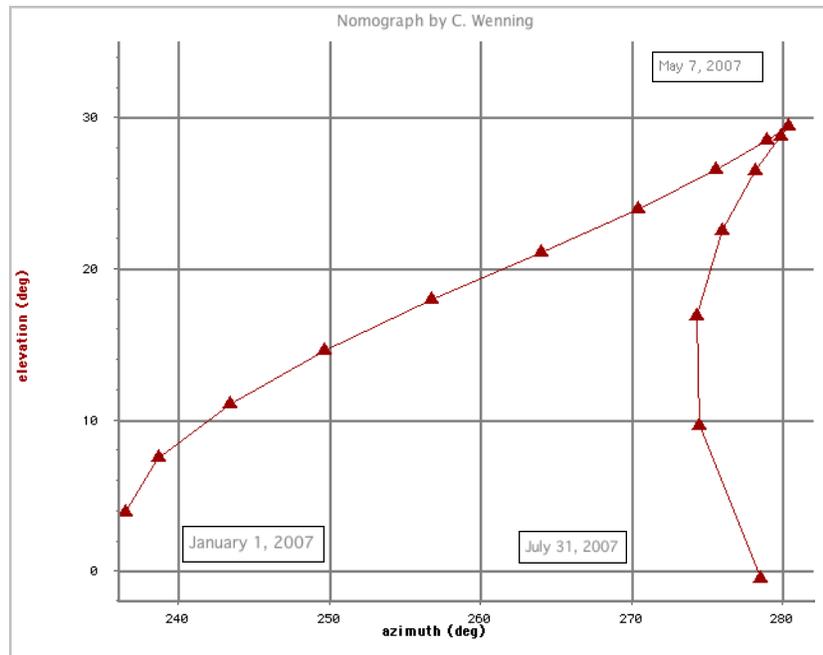
The planet Venus will entertain amateur astronomers throughout the first half of 2007. Having emerged from the glare of the Sun in December 2006, the planet will slowly rise higher in the evening sky relative to the Sun with each passing day. The planet will reach its highest distance above the western horizon in early July. This is despite the fact that the planet has its greatest eastern elongation from the Sun on June 9 at 45.4 degrees. The accompanying nomograph depicts the brilliant planet's position in the western evening sky 45 minutes after sunset.

Early in the year the planet will be found low in the southwest, just above the location of the setting sun. Because the planet is just past superior conjunction and having just passed

behind the sun this past October 27th, its motion relative to the sun will be quite slow. After the planet reaches greatest distance east of the sun, it will reverse its motion relative to the background stars (starting July 25<sup>th</sup>) as it prepares to pass roughly between the earth and sun on August 18<sup>th</sup>. While it will take Venus 18 weeks to reach its greatest altitude relative to the sun, it will only take about 12 weeks for it to fall out of the evening sky. This is so because near the time of inferior conjunction, the planet is nearest the earth and its apparent motion most rapid. Approximately 33 days before passing roughly between the earth and Sun (July 14), it will reach its greatest brilliance at a magnitude of -3.9.

Even a pair of binoculars will

show Venus to exhibit a distinct set of phases – gibbous when emerging from behind the sun, half phase at greatest elongation, and crescent as it nears the time when it passes roughly between the earth and sun. Still, some might find the phases somewhat paradoxical. When Venus exhibits a near full phase during the early part of the year, it will be dimmest. When it exhibits only a thin crescent phase, it will be at its brightest. This contradicts common sense and the experiences we have with our own moon. The explanation of this apparent conundrum is that when Venus is at full phase, it is nearly on the far side of the sun. When it is in crescent phase, it is closest to the earth. The changing distance accounts for the change in brightness.



## SGO KEYHOLDER PAYMENTS DUE

Keyholders of the Sugar Grove Observatory are hereby reminded that the annual keyholder renewal payment for the coming year is now due. Please be certain to make the \$5 payment to TCAA Treasurer Duane Yockey. If you no longer wish to be an SGO key holder with its attendant benefits and responsibilities, please return your key to one of the Board members.

## A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

~ by Carl J. Wenning ~

New Years Day is often accompanied by resolutions – things we intend for the coming year that somehow we failed to do last year. I've made quite a few resolutions, and have just as quickly failed to carry them out – lose weight, get exercise, sleep more, read more, work less, take some vacation time – the list goes on and on. As a result, I'm not much for promoting resolutions for the New Year. This year, however, I will make an exception. I encourage you to read Leslie C. Peltier's book *Starlight Nights: The Adventures of a Star-Gazer*. You might not recognize the name of the author or the title of book, but every amateur astronomer should. The name belongs to one the most famous amateur astronomers of all time, and is one of the most endearing personal stories you will ever read.

When you think of famous astronomical places, the Buckeye State probably doesn't rank very highly on your list. When you think of famous astronomers, Peltier

probably doesn't even make the list. Nonetheless, they both should. I encourage you to resolve to read *Starlight Nights*. Once you do this, you'll understand why I make this recommendation. Peltier lived his whole life in Delphos, Ohio, a rural town on the northwestern side of the state. I grew up in Celina, Ohio, about 35 miles as the crow flies from the home of Peltier, his "strawberry telescope," and his "merry-go-round observatory." Unfortunately, I didn't come to know about Peltier until after he passed away in 1980. Within a year of two of his death, I traveled with Dr. Brent Archinal, then of the U.S. Naval Observatory (we attended Ohio State together), to visit Peltier's home and see his observatory.

I have read Peltier's book, *Starlight Nights*, several times and each time have been fascinated by his vibrant recollections and wonderful story telling. It has the power of a well-told story. It's like hearing the storytelling of Garrison Keil-

lor of *Lake Woebegone Days* and *Prairie Home Companion*. David Levy, during his visit with the TCAA in 2005, recommended that every amateur astronomer read this book. He stated, "Many books explain how to observe the sky; *Starlight Nights* explains why. I have not encountered a single work that comes close to capturing the passion of sky watching." After you have read it, you'll start looking at the sky a whole new way and will commence observing with renewed vigor.

Peltier lived in Delphos his entire life, from 1900 to 1980. There he made 132,000 variable star observations and discovered 12 comets and 6 novae – most of them with a 6" telescope. His book is available from Amazon.com for a mere \$13.57 plus shipping. Make it your New Year's resolution to read this book or, if you have read it before, to read it again. It is piquant in the extreme, and can light a fire in the cockles of your heart. This is a great book to cozy up with during the cold winter months – take my word for it.

## OBSERVING LOG DECEMBER 2006

On Thursday, December 14, William Carney observed a strong auroral display that resulted from a large solar flare on the sun only a day earlier. William noted via the TCAA listserv, "I hope everyone got out to look at the Aurora tonight. It's the best I have ever seen from this location. I went to Lake Evergreen for about an hour till I got too cold and tired.

There was a curved band of light from the NNW to the NNE from 5 to 15 degrees thick and almost completely from the horizon up to 15 degrees in the center. Covering about 60 or more degrees of sky from E to W. Occasionally there was bands or pillars of light more than 25 to 30 degrees high. Not much color, just blue-green. The bands or

pillars were quite distinct. I even could see some detail from my house here 8 blocks from downtown" (Bloomington). A photograph depicting what William observed can be viewed at the following URL: <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap061218.html>. William pointed out the picture and remarked, "Here's a good shot of what I saw last week. I did not see any red color though."

Tune in to

# StarDate

On

## WGLT, 89.1 FM

Sponsored by the TCAA

Partners in Astronomy Education with

the ISU Planetarium

at

309-438-5007

# SUGAR GROVE WEB SITE

~ by Carl J. Wenning ~

It's probable that most TCAAers have never visited the SGNC web site. Back in 2003 I saw it for the first time, and then lost track of it. Only recently did I conduct an extended search to find it. A Google search on "Sugar Grove Nature Center" did not reveal it. Only when I started playing around with possible "Funk's Grove" URL's did I stumble across it once again. To view this website, point your web browser to <http://www.funksgrove.org/>. Follow the hyperlink to SGNC, and from there to the TCAA page. Among the many things you will find is a fine picture of the SGO. Unfortunately, it appears as though the web page has not been updated since 2003. Someone might make it their New Year's resolution to get this page updated. In addition, the TCAA webpage might also be linked to the "hidden" SGNC web site. Volunteers anyone?

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR 2007 POS AND MOOS EVENTS

Public and members-only observing sessions for 2007 have been set. Volunteers are needed to coordinate these events. The public observing sessions will occur on the following Saturdays, and will feature the following objects:

March 24 – Great Nebula of Orion  
April 21 – Ring World Saturn  
May 19 – Galaxies of Leo, Coma, and Virgo  
June 16 – Globular Clusters M3 and M13  
July 21 – First Quarter Moon and Jupiter  
August 18 – Planetary Nebulas M27 and M57  
September 15 – The Milky Way Galaxy  
October 13 – Double Cluster in Perseus

Start times for each of these events will depend upon the time of sunset. A detailed schedule can be found at <http://twincityamateurastronomers.org/>.

Coordinators are also needed for MOOS events. Members only observing sessions take place one week prior to the above dates, which are the Saturdays nearest to or slightly before new moon.

Please contact a TCAA Board member if you are willing to host one of these events.

# TCAA Treasurer's Report – December 2006

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OPERATING FUND BALANCE – November 30, 2006 - \$ 1,851.87

Income

Ben Josefik (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 40.00
Meghana Deshpande (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 40.00
Roy Ostberg (Sen. Dues Renewal) -	\$ 25.00
Kal Kumar (Elec. News. Dues Renewal) -	\$ 25.00
Tim Winter (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 40.00
John Werner (Dues) -	\$ 40.00
Duane Yockey (Dues Renewal) -	\$ 40.00

Expenses

LYB Inc. (December Observer) -	\$ 15.12
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OPERATING FUND BALANCE – December 31, 2006 - \$ 2,086.75

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OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – November 30, 2006 - \$ 1,034.33

Income

None -	\$ 0.00
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Expenses

None -	\$ 0.00
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OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – December 31, 2006 - \$ 1,034.33

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TOTAL TCAA FUNDS – December 31, 2006 - \$ 3,121.08

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Respectfully submitted,  
L. Duane Yockey, Treasurer

## Sugar Grove Observatory

### Listing of Official Keyholders (Paid \$10 deposit/\$5 renewal)

Duane Yockey (April 2001, renewed through 2006)  
Michael Rogers (August 2001, renewed through 2006)  
William Carney (March 2002, renewed through 2006)  
Carl Wenning (January 2004, renewed through 2006)  
Brian Barling (February 2004, renewed through 2006)  
Kevin Brown (May 2005, renewed through 2006)  
Christopher Franklin (July 2005, renewed through 2006)  
David Osenga (January 2006)  
Gerry Schoeder (February 2006, renewed through 2007)  
Karen & Ed Duran (February 2006)  
Josh Lindsey (August 2007)



Welcome to New Member

**John Werner**

A HAPPY  
NEW YEAR



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**The OBSERVER**

Newletter of the TCAA, Inc.

Erin Estabrook, Editor  
314 Covey Court  
Normal, IL 61761

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

Visit the Twin City Amateur Astronomers  
on the web at  
[www.twincityamateurastronomers.org/](http://www.twincityamateurastronomers.org/)