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DARK SKY OVER NEW MEXICO

By Dan Miller and John Werner

Two TCAA members, who are also faculty at Millikin University, had a dream – a dream to provide an opportunity for students and adults to observe and photograph under one of the darkest skies in the nation – City of Rocks State Park, New Mexico.

The dream was realized between May 22nd and May 29th for sixteen Millikin students, one University of Illinois student (John's son Joel), two adult enrichment participants (John's wife Joyce and brother-in-law Don), Dan's son Chris, and three other Millikin faculty - Eric Martell, Michael Rogers (yet another TCAA presence!), and Casey Watson. Dan Miller and John Werner created the Immersion 2007 Introduction to Astronomy and Astrophotography course on a tight timeline. Every spare minute between January and May was used to upgrade Millikin cameras, telescopes, and accessories. Logistics, travel, equipment, and course activity planning seemed endless.

Dan and John scoured the web to find the right location. After a couple dead-ends, Dan found the perfect site in City of Rocks State Park. Monolithic rocks, formed of volcanic ash welded together 30 million years ago dot the landscape. The ancients that roamed this area left enduring carvings and paintings of their culture. There are only six other sites in the world that are similar. The campsites were astronomy themed and there was an on site observatory housing a 14" Meade telescope. The park rangers were outstanding to work with. Camp site costs were minimal, as we agreed to host a public observing session for the park.

After a planning trip to New Mexico during college spring break, details were finalized. Dan and John transported by pickup truck and thirty-two foot RV, cots, thirteen tents, a generator (we had no outlets in our private camping area of the park), chairs, tables, and seemingly endless equipment on a two-day, 29 hour driving time, 1,450 mile, six miles to the gallon, transport to New Mexico. Each hour was planned for the participants. Daytime activities included solar observing, a GPS-aided petroglyph hunt, field trips to local historical sites, and of course the minimum 2 to 3 am or all night observing and photography sessions.

Any adventure includes adversities to overcome. We had daily afternoon 30 mph winds, several rattlesnake encounters (no bites), a flash high-wind and hail storm, and a generator that broke down due to altitude sickness. But in all of this the students and adults perse-



vered. Student projects ranged from mapping the Moon's topography using a webcam from Orion telescopes, wide-field constellation photography, galaxy and nebula classification, plotting planetary and satellite motions, monitoring solar flare and sunspot activity, and astro-archeology. One early morning highlight was observing a bolide light up the night sky. The planets Mercury, Saturn, and Jupiter were in very favorable positions for observing. A few of us observed all eight planets in one night of observing.

Our telescopes included seven 8" Meade's, one 9.25" Celestron, and a 4" piggybacked Vixen refractor. Camera equipment included four SBIG ST7's, two webcams, and two Canon digital SLR's. Near-perfect polar alignment resulted in outstanding tracking and results for the students. Over sixty state park campers came to the public observing session hosted by our students. Ranger Ken invited us back – no fee required!!

Will Dan and John return? It was only upon our return that we realized the extent of the physical demands on our bodies. But it was an experience of a lifetime. We think there is another story or two left in us.

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.

TCAA OFFICERS

- President Lee Green
lee@starlightsoftware.com
- Vice-President Michael Rogers
309-825-6454
mprogers@mac.com
- Secretary/Historian Carl Wenning
309-454-4164
cjwennin@ilstu.edu
- Treasurer Duane Yockey
309-452-3936
duane@lybinc.com
- Publicity/Web Michael Rogers
309-825-6454
mprogers@mac.com
- 4th Director Dave Osenga
DaveOsenga@msn.com
- 5th Director John Werner
res1mpc9@verizon.net

Property Manager

William Carney 309-829-7748
willcarney@aol.com

Observer Editor

Erin Estabrook
314 Covey Court
Normal, IL 61761
309-454-6894
erin@lybinc.com

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

JUNE PICNIC A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

~ contributions by C. Wenning & L. Green ~

The sky couldn't have been clearer, and the weather more pleasant than it was for the June 9th annual picnic of the TCAA. By Lee Green's count, some 28 club members showed up at the SGNC for what turned out to be a very memo-

rable Saturday evening. Four fires were lit and by 7:00 p.m. everyone was merrily munching on steaks, burgers, fish, tandoori chicken, beef and chicken kabobs, veggie burgers, and tofu hotdogs. Yum!

The potluck food was quite varied and delicious; the conversations were stimulating and it was wonderful to see and talk with everyone. Several spouses of active club member came along and we had a chance to meet them as well. Carl Wenning provided a challenging presentation for us - *Observatories I have*

visited. Can you guess their identities? This 30-minute program, featuring exterior and interior images of twenty-nine observatories, was so very entertaining and engaging that everyone forgot to look for the International Space Station with the Space Shuttle Atlantis in pursuit that swept across the northern sky at around 9:13 p.m.

We had seven telescopes set up for perusing the wonders of the cosmos, and most continued to observe until just after 11 p.m. Two hardy members stayed out until just after midnight. Thanks to all who turned out and made this event so memorable.



CLAUDIO PÉREZ ARRIVES FROM SANTIAGO, CHILE

Professor Claudio Pérez, Carl Wenning's friend from Santiago, Chile, has arrived in the USA. Claudio, chairman of the Physics Department at Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación (UMCE), is working with Carl at Dominican University near Chicago this summer to present a three-week Modeling Method workshop for in-service high school physics teachers. Claudio is in charge of physics teacher preparation at his university in the same fashion that Carl is in charge of it at Illinois State University.

Carl and Claudio met during Carl's 8-day trip to Chile earlier this year. Carl was in Chile at the request of the Chilean Academy of Sciences to review and make recommendations about secondary science teacher preparation in the country. The two met at a conference in Santiago where both were invited speakers.

Claudio lives in Santiago during the week, but retires to his Andean mountain retreat southeast of Santiago each weekend where he can observe the dark southern sky to great advantage. He has expressed an interest in meeting TCAA members, and viewing a bit of the northern sky during his weekend stays in Normal on June 30/July 1 and July 7/8. Carl will be contacting the membership through the listserv when it looks like a night of viewing from SGNC might be possible. He encourages as many TCAA members as possible to turn out for this event, and to get to know Claudio who is an extremely congenial fellow. Claudio is shown in the accompanying photograph along with Carl and a UMCE colleague physicist - Dr. Marcela Bobadilla G.



REBECCA WENNING WEDS



Rebecca Wenning, former editor of *The OBSERVER*, was wedded to Chrystian Veyra on Saturday, June 16th, at historic St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Bloomington. Rebecca is daughter of TCAAer Carl Wenning and his wife Carolyn. Also in attendance at the marriage festivities were TCAA members Sharon MacDonald, Mike Miller, and Duane Yockey. Rebecca graduated at the end of spring semester summa cum laude and as Bone Student Scholar from ISU. She earned a B.S. degree in Physics Education, and will be teaching physics and other science subjects at East Peoria Community High School. There she has access to her own 14-inch Meade LX200 in the school's observatory. Perhaps in the not too distant future there will be an opportunity for the TCAA to cooperate with Rebecca and her students. Congratulations to Rebecca and Chrystian!

Coordinators are needed still for several of the 2007 Public and Members Only Observing Sessions at Sugar Grove Nature Center. Additional POS coordinators are needed; two per session are preferred. Please sign up by contacting one of the Board members if you are willing to host or co-host one of these sessions.

Members Only Observing Sessions occur one week earlier than the above POS. Coordinators (who should be SGNC key holders unless they have their own telescope) are still needed for nearly all of these sessions. Please sign up by contacting one of the Board members if you are willing to coordinate one of these events.

MOOS 2007 Date	MOOS Coordinator(s)
July 14	1. Brian Barling 2.
August 11	1. Lee Green 2.
September 8	1. 2.
October 6	1. 2.

2007 Date	POS Topic(s)	POS Coordinator(s)
July 21	First Quarter Moon and Jupiter	1. John Werner 2. Lee Green
August 18	Planetary Nebulas M27 and M57	1. Carl Wenning 2. Michael Rogers
September 15	The Milky Way Galaxy	1. Carl Wenning 2. Dave Osenga
October 13	Double Cluster in Perseus	1. Lee Green 2.

JUNE POS GRATIFYING

~ Adapted from reports by Lee Green ~

At least 40 people came out to the June public observing session at SGNC on the evening of Saturday, June 16th. Members of the general public had heard about us from accounts in the *Pantagraph*, from fliers at the Bloomington Public Library, and from the SGNC newsletter. The turnout was especially gratifying because the sky had been overcast most of the day, and events didn't get under way until after 9:00 p.m.

Duane Yockey provided attendees with a fascinating introduction to globular clusters in general, and M3 and M13 in particular. Dave Osenga followed with a wonderful tour of the sky highlighting at least 18 constellations.

During Dave's sky lecture, he told about the mythology of many these, pointed out asterisms, located a variety of Messier objects. Further, he familiarized us with the sky, about telescopes, binoculars and observing techniques and handed out reference material. The skies were mostly clear even though we saw lightning repeatedly toward the northeast horizon.

The two-day-old moon was dramatic, and Saturn and Jupiter were enjoyed by all. M3 and M13 were both clearly visible and provided a culminating touch to Duane's PowerPoint presentation. Another highlight occurred when the international space station (linked with the Space Shuttle) passed over at 10:06 p.m. We all got a charge out of that. We stayed around until 11:30.

Thanks to Duane, Dave and William Carney for staffing the telescopes, to Dan Miller who had his *SkyScout* set up for additional presentation and instruction, and to all the other members who joined us. It was a great session and everyone I spoke with sure enjoyed joining us.

ILLINOIS DARK SKY STAR PARTY SEPT. 13-16, 2007

The Illinois Dark Skies Star Party will be held September 13-16 at Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area. There are several good reasons to attend this star party: 1) meeting up with old friends, 2) checking out the equipment you're thinking of buying, and 3) observing under dark skies. Observing is the reason and observing is the focus of the Illinois Dark Skies Star Party. Remember that new eyepiece you bought; the filters too? You may have bought them elsewhere but you'll get to put them through their paces at the Illinois Dark Skies Star Party. Check for additional information and registration forms at the following URL: <http://www.sas-sky.org/main.html>. For additional information, contact Ray Watt raywatt@hotmail.com.

ASTRONOMY WORKSHOP FOR EDUCATORS

A FREE online astronomy workshop will be held from September 12 through October 10, 2007 and is open to all TCAA members who are actively involved in education/public outreach. "Astronomy from the Ground Up" is a National Science Foundation sponsored online astronomy workshop exclusively for nature center and other informal educators. The time commitment is approximately 5 hours per week. According to a recent participant, "This course has been exciting -- both 'content-wise' and 'technologically-wise.' I am quite impressed with what has gone into producing it -- and as an adjunct online professor, somewhat envious." Apply now to be considered for this FREE online workshop at

<http://astrosociety.org/afgu/distance.html>.

JULY SKY GUIDE

01	Venus passes 0.8° south of Saturn, 8 P.M.	
03	The Moon passes 1.3° south of Neptune, 2 P.M.	
05	The Moon passes 1.9° north of Uranus, 4 P.M.	
09	The Moon passes 6° north of Mars, 10 A.M.	
12	Venus reaches greatest brilliancy (magnitude-4.7), 9 A.M.	
	The Moon passes 9° north of Mercury, 10 P.M.	
16	Venus passes 2° south of Regulus, 10 A.M.	
	The Moon passes 0.04° south of Saturn, 6 P.M.	
17	The Moon passes 0.3° north of Regulus, 4 A.M.	
	The Moon passes 3° north of Venus, 5 A.M.	
20	Mercury is at greatest western elongation (20°), 10 A.M.	
25	The Moon passes 0.6° south of Antares, 11 A.M.	
	The Moon passes 6° south of Jupiter, 1 P.M.	
30	The Moon passes 1.3° south of Neptune, 8 P.M.	

HISTORY OF THE TCAA: PART 3

By Carl J. Wenning

Historian's Note: Beginning with the article, "The Origin of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers" in the May issues of The OBSERVER, Carl Wenning, TCAA Historian, began chronicling the history of the club. This article is the third of a series.

Beginning in August of 1961 David Williams prepared a monthly astronomy club tabloid of one or two pages. The purpose of this newsletter was, among other things, to document the activities of the club's members. Each newsletter included information about meeting dates, astronomical events, observing ideas, and other club news. After several suggestions by club members that the newsletter be named, a contest was held to do so. Dave Williams' own suggestion, *The OBSERVER of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers*, won. The newsletter first carried the name on the June 1962 edition.

The OBSERVER described a small but very active club. Members were involved in meteor observing, observation of variable stars, and occultations of Jupiter's moons. On four evenings in December of 1961, members Henry Janecek and Bill Blunk observed and charted 111 members of the Geminid meteor shower. Delta Cephei was observed and 31 magnitude estimates made by David Williams, Henry (Hank) Janecek, and Weldon Schuette from October 1961 to January 1962. Half a dozen members, including John Kieviet, completed their homemade telescopes before the first two years of the club came to pass. Weldon Schuette observed the Echo satellite over 400 times. Public observing sessions were held. Attendance for trips to the Adler Planetarium in Chicago exceeded 20 several times as well. By April 1962 the club membership had stabilized at approximately 30 members, with generally ten persons attending each club function.

By the second year fully one-half of the TCAA membership was composed of junior high school aged members. These members would be partitioned off in October 1963, under the leadership of Hank Janecek, into a separate group that could more easily cater to the wants and needs of the younger set. Tim McCarthy was elected president; Paul McClure, vice-president; Mike Fisher, secretary/treasurer; and Henry Charneskey, librarian.

Of particular note among the junior members were four very active high school boys by the names of David Williams, Mike Ryder, Taylor Cisco, and John Bryan. These individuals, all high school students, were extremely active amateur telescope makers and observers. These individuals inspired many of the club's early activities. They frequently traveled to the Peoria Academy of Sciences' Northmoore Observatory for all-night observing sessions, observing primarily lunar and planetary objects.

The TCAA's early involvement with the town of Normal nearly paid off by way of a public observatory on city property. Members had reason to believe that the town would completely fund such an observatory, and approached the city council for approval. Upon the recommendation of Normal Parks and Recreation new director, Mr. Jerry MacDonald, the club undertook a program of selling hot chocolate to ice skaters at Fairview Park as a money-making project. During the months of December 1961 and January 1962 the ladies of the club, headed by Bertha Kieviet, generated \$55.00 for the project. Upon a further examination of the costs involved, the proposal was rejected by the city fathers as too expensive.

OBSERVATORY IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED

~ by Lee Green ~

At the last board meeting, we discussed and approved a plan to install shelves in the Sugar Grove Observatory.

My friend Danny Rhodes, who is an excellent carpenter, volunteered to help us out and on June 30 I assisted him in the construction. Along the back wall, we added a base and three 8 foot wide shelves providing storage spaces with heights of 24", 18", 18" and 16".

Before we started, it was difficult to enter the room due to the video projector, telescopes and mounts. After we were done, all the telescopes lay on the shelves, the mounts are stored in back of the room and the projector has a home out of the way.

With the improved space utilization and organization, we now have room to maneuver and room to grow.

PROFILES IN AMATEUR ASTRONOMY: WILLIAM R. CARNEY

By Carl J. Wenning

Historian's note: Over the next few months I will focus the membership's attention on the TCAA's premiere observers with their assistance. The intention is to introduce our membership to another and provide opportunities to further develop relationships within our association.

Anyone who is around the TCAA for even a short time usually gets to know William Carney. William is the "go to" guy when it comes to equipment; he currently serves as equipment manager for the club, and this includes duties as director of the Sugar Grove Observatory and manager of the club's library and loaner telescope program.

His interest in astronomy started at a very early age. According to William, "I received my first 'scope when I was about 9 or 10, but no one thing I can think of really sparked my interest." Whatever started William down the path of amateur astronomy, it still appears to be operating. "I started serious observing around 1976 viewing and photographing Comet West. I heard about the TCAA very early, and did attend a few meetings and programs; however, I did not join until about 1977 or 1978 because I was too young and did not have a car."

Some of William's fondest astronomical memories have to do with his participation in the TCAA. "I did meet quite a few of the early members during the early years, and became friends with Weldon Schuette especially." One of William's earliest memories of the TCAA is associated with observing the night sky from the home of Bob Finnegan in Downs, IL. There Bob – president for several years during the early 1970s and again several times during the 1980s – maintained a domed observatory – the Marie Antoinette Observatory – that housed a 14-inch Celestron SCT. William remarks, "I remember that I visited the old observatory in 1973 or 1974 to observe Comet Kohoutek." Years later that dome would be donated to the TCAA and is now caps the Sugar Grove Observatory.

William's love has long been astrophotography. "I took a lot of pictures from the 70's thru the early 90's with my 60-mm refractor. The refractor was really the only scope I owned until just recently. Just before one of our members passed on I purchased his 8-inch Celestron. Then, a few years ago, I also purchased a good Orion 4.7-inch short focal length refractor as well. I was a member of the A.A.V.S.O. for about 20 years, but did not actually report too many observations."

William is one of the TCAA's outstanding amateur astronomers. He was inducted to the G. Weldon Schuette Society of Outstanding Amateur Astronomers in 2006. This award was long overdue, and this was probably an oversight. Because William has had such an outstanding observing career, many members just assumed that he was already a member of the Schuette Society. He is one of only seven members to be so recognized since 1986 when the award was first presented.

William earned his honorary Messier certificate over 20 year ago. As he tells it, "I got my Messier certificate in 1986 with Weldon [Schuette] actually verifying most of my observations using club 'scopes." The Messier award was the first of four Astronomical League awards earned by William – a club record. "I used the club's 4-inch refractor to do most of my observations for the Lunar Club award in 2000. In 2003, I used my Celestron mostly for the Urban Award. I achieved all 110 Messier object observations by binoculars for the Binocular Messier Award just a few years ago." As a holder



of these four Astronomical League awards, William is certainly one of the most decorated members the TCAA has ever had. William further notes, "I am currently working on the Herschel 400, Asteroid Observer, and Comet Observer programs, and plan to start others when the Herschel is completed." William has made good progress toward all his current observing goals, and his many observations are legendary. If he earns these latter awards, he'll be among the most decorated amateur astronomers in the nation.

William notes, "Comets and asteroids are constantly being found by amateurs, and amateurs are doing significant work in the areas of variable star studies and photography. Amateurs today commonly own telescopes in the range of 12 or 14 inches, but it is not at all unusual to see them up to 24 inches or even larger. That was unheard of twenty years ago. There is almost no difference in the equipment and talents between amateur and professional astronomers nowadays. Amateur astronomy is having a re-birth due to technological innovations. Helping this is the fact that equipment prices for some of even the most sophisticated equipment are now in the range that the amateur astronomer can afford. I would like to eventually get a good CCD or other digital camera for astronomy use. There is so much amateurs can contribute nowadays."

As a life-long native of Bloomington, the TCAA has been the only astronomy club to which William has belonged. In high school and college he did take some astronomy courses to increase his knowledge in this area. Because of his interest in geology and model rocketry, William hasn't always had as much free time as he would like to participate in TCAA activities. "I did not do much construction work on the current observatory, but I did help a little in dismantling, cleaning, and reassembling the dome as well as digging some for the foundation."

While he might be reticent to admit it, William is the longest continuous participating member in the TCAA. He has remained active in the group since he first officially joined three decades ago. He is one of a handful of members who can actually remember John and Bertha Kieviet, the co-founders of our club, Weldon Schuette, the club's original "outstanding amateur astronomer," Gene, Donna and Mike Miller, members who started with the group in 1961, Bob Finnegan, the original owner of the dome now atop SGO, Gary Skinner, Bill Zaffiri, and...the list goes on and on.

"Although I was never president," he remarks, "I have held several offices over the years including vice president and librarian when we had that post for a few years. William has repeatedly served on the TCAA's Board of Directors since the club was incorporated about 20 years ago.

MUSINGS OF A SIDEWALK AMATEUR ASTRONOMER

By Carl J. Wenning

On Friday evening, June 8th, I decided to take a play out of the handbook of urban astronomers. I sat up my Celestron 11-inch “goto” telescope near the sidewalk of my front yard to do a bit of observing, expecting to give neighbors who might be walking by an opportunity a “peek” at the universe. The session wasn’t so much geared toward making detailed observations as it was to learn better how to integrate Voyager III software and a computer with my telescope.

While I found it fairly easy to operate the telescope using the PC, I found for the first time in years that I was somewhat lacking in my knowledge about selected astronomical objects that I shared with my neighbors – about a half a dozen of whom stopped by when they heard my telescope slewing across the sky and saw my glowing computer screen in the semidarkness. After spending just under three hours being an urban sidewalk astronomer, I concluded the following:

- People would probably would never venture out to the SGNC to attend their first observing session became highly entranced with what they saw; this might well lead to future ventures out to SGNC to attend one of the TCAA’s public observing sessions or to even join the club.
- While the city sky is relatively bright, one can still find a considerable number of celestial objects using the capacity of a “goto” telescope. By aligning my telescope on three bright stars, I was able to find objects that I probably had no hope of finding were I to do it manually.
- With a “goto” telescope it was easy to show brighter galaxies such as M87, 81, and 82. Small planetary nebulas such as the Cat’s Eye were a “breeze” and exhibited discernable color due to their small size and relative brightness. Both open (M11) and globular clusters (M3, 13, 92) were excellent. Jupiter was easily observed as would be expected.
- Because so little time is spent moving the telescope by hand to find celestial objects, a lot more objects can be observed. In fact, with a properly aligned telescope the general public can see lots of objects without the telescopist even having to get up from the computer. Critical alignment is required for this form of viewing, but it’s very easy to do.
- It’s nice to have a computer program to show the constellations, and demonstrate the pointing position of the telescope, and show photographs of what the viewers are seeing. Computer software can be used to provide basic information about celestial objects such as distance, size, and location.
- Because the observer has more time to talk with visitors about celestial objects, one’s detailed knowledge about celestial objects must likewise increase. Were I to do sidewalk astronomy on a regular basis, I would spend more time preparing to relate considerably more factual details about the objects observed.

The time I spent doing sidewalk astronomy was rather enjoyable. I had a chance to meet home of my neighbors for the first time. It was nice to know that they seemed to know about me and my former affiliation with the ISU Planetarium. I know that I made a number of new friends that night; now, I just hope that I can recognize them in the light of day!

PHOTOGRAPH FROM NCRAL MEETING



Shown here are those who assembled at the May NCRAL meeting in Moorhead, ND. Can you find Duane Yockey and Carl Wenning who represented the TCAA?

TCAA Treasurer's Report – June 2007

OPERATING FUND BALANCE – May 31, 2007 - \$ 2,718.67 *

Income

Dave Osenga (Elect. Dues Renewal, 4/30) - \$ 25.00
Bank error (in our favor) - \$ 0.60
Josh Lindsey (student dues renewal) - \$ 25.00
James Wall (dues renewal) - \$ 40.00
Mark Cabaj (dues renewal) - \$ 40.00

Expenses

LYB Inc. (June Observer) - \$ 15.99
Abrams Planetarium (sky calendars) - \$ 118.80
Astronomical League (dues) - \$ 210.00

OPERATING FUND BALANCE – June 30, 2007 - \$ 2,504.48

OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – May 31, 2007 - \$ 1,107.86

Income

Golden Prairie Public Library (honorarium)- \$ 25.00
Mark Cabaj (Donation) - \$ 10.00
Josh Lindsey (keyholder renewal) - \$ 5.00

Expenses

None - \$ 0.00

OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – June 30, 2007 - \$ 1,147.86

TOTAL TCAA FUNDS – June 30, 2007 - \$ 3,652.34 *

Respectfully submitted,
L. Duane Yockey, Treasurer

Sugar Grove Observatory

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

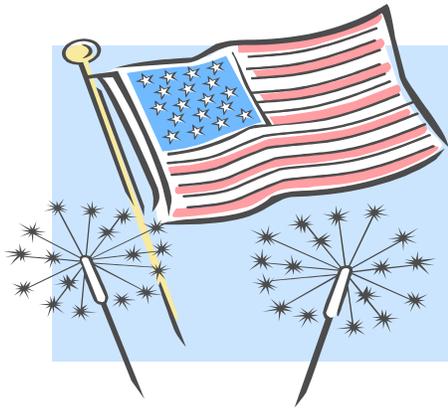
Duane Yockey (renewed through 2007)
Michael Rogers (renewed through 2006)
William Carney (renewed through 2007)
Carl Wenning (renewed through 2007)
Brian Barling (renewed through 2007)
Christopher Franklin (renewed through 2007)
David Osenga (renewed through 2007)
Gerry Schroeder (renewed through 2007)
Josh Lindsey (renewed through 2007)
Andrew Morrison (February 2007)
Dan Miller (renewed through 2007)
Lee Green (April 2007, renewed through 2008)



UPCOMING EVENTS

July 14 – MOOS

July 21 – POS



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/