

The OBSERVER

The Newsletter of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, Inc.

November 2005 Volume 30, Number 11



PUBLIC OBSERVING SESSION NOVEMBER 5TH

In This Issue:

- Public Observing Session.....1
- Good Will Program/Election...1
- Astronomy Course.....2
- Public Observing Sessions.....2
- Board Meeting Minutes.....3
- E/PO Updates.....4
- NCRAL Convention.....5
- October Treasurer's Report...6
- Magazine Subscriptions.....7
- Observing Updates.....7

- November Sky Calendar

The Twin City Amateur Astronomers will host their last public observing session for the year at Sugar Grove Nature Center on Saturday, November 5th, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The featured object for the evening will be the Mars. Mars made its closest approach to Earth on October 30th, and appears opposite the sun on November 7th. The best telescopic views in years are expected. Carl Wenning, ISU Planetarium Director from 1978 through 2000, will present a 20-minute talk about the Red Planet, and what makes this year's appearance so special. He will then follow this up with a 10-minute sky lecture under the stars. Afterward, observations of Mars and other celestial objects will be conducted using the Sugar Grove Observatory and ground-based telescopes. In the event of an overcast sky on November 5th, the observing session will be rescheduled for Monday, November 7th, also at 7:00 p.m. If uncertain about whether or not an observing session will be held due to clouds, call either of the following

309-area-code cell phone numbers 1-2 hours before the expected start of the observing session: 830-4085 (Carl) or 825-6454 (Michael).

GOOD WILL PROGRAM & ELECTION NOVEMBER 12TH

~ by Carl J. Wenning ~

In recognition of member support, ISU Planetarium Director Tom Willmitch will provide a "good will offering" for all members of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers for assisting with the recent fund raising campaigns. Tom will present the free planetarium program *Ring Worlds* to the TCAA at 3:30 p.m., on Saturday, November 12.

Ring Worlds was first shown during summer 2004, and is arguably one of the best planetarium programs ever to have been shown at ISU. The program focuses on the ring systems of planets within our solar system, and contains some amazing video clips. Tom has fully integrated the computer automation capabilities of the planetarium to provide an

TCAA Calendar of Events

- November 5: Public Observing Session at SGNC, 7:00 p.m. "Opposition of Mars"
Coordinators: #1 - Michael Rogers, #2 - Dan Miller
- November 7: Backup date for Public Observing Session
- November 12: TCAA ISU Planetarium Show, free, 3:30p.m. "Ring Worlds"
- November 12: Election, Panera Bread (near Wal-Mart), 5:30 p.m.
- January 7: Astronomy Course sequence begins at SGNC, \$30 materials fee, 7:00p.m.
- February 11: Annual Meeting

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
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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

amazingly complex, refined, and awe-inspiring presentation. The TCAA has not seen this program as a group, and I strongly urge our membership to attend this special presentation.

Immediately following this presentation, members are invited to travel to Panera Bread Company (near Wal-Mart) for supper and for an election to place another member on the TCAA Board, replacing Lyle Rich. See the minutes of the Board meeting for details.

***TCAA ASTRONOMY COURSE
BEGINS AT SGNC JANUARY 7***

Make plans now to participate in a multi-part observational astronomy course to be held at Sugar Grove Nature Center on four successive Saturday evenings during January. The course is open to anyone 12 years of age (with accompanying adult) or older. 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, an introduction to the celestial sphere, the nature of celestial objects, how to use a computer-driven "go to" telescope, and observing programs. 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.

***2006 SGNC PUBLIC
OBSERVING SESSIONS SET***

The public observing session schedule for 2006 has been set by the TCAA Board of Directors. The dates, times, and featured objects are given below. Note that due to moon phasing, there will be two POS during July. Coordinators are needed for all events, and SGO key holders especially are requested to volunteer to coordinate these events. (Contact Carl Wenning at 454-4164 or cjwennin@ilstu.edu.) Events consist of a 15-20 minute

presentation, a 10-minute laser mediated sky lecture, and observing with ground-based and SGO telescopes.

- April 1
8:00 PM ~ 10:00 PM
Saturn and Mars
- May 6
8:30 PM ~ 10:30 PM
Moon and the Zodiac
- June 3
9:00 PM ~ 11:00 PM
Jupiter and its Moons
- July 1
9:00 PM ~ 11:00 PM
Stars of Red, White & Blue
- July 29
8:45 PM ~ 10:45 PM
Clusters, Nebulas & Galaxies
- Aug 26
8:00 PM ~ 10:00 PM
The Milky Way
- Sep 30
7:15 PM ~ 9:15 PM
Uranus and Neptune
- Oct 28
7:00 PM ~ 9:00 PM
Andromeda Galaxy & Companions

Members Only Observing Sessions will take place one week before the above dates and will start approximately 30 minutes later than

the times indicated above. MOOS events also run approximately two hours. As a courtesy, please arrive early if you expect to make observations with the assistance of others. Again, coordinators will be needed for these future events. Both POS and MOOS take place at Sugar Grove Nature Center, and are cancelled in the event of an overcast sky.

TCAA BOARD MEETING MINUTES

5 October 2005

~ Michael Rogers, Secretary ~

The Board of Directors met at the offices of Lewis, Yockey and Brown on 5 October 2005. In attendance were President Kal Kumar, Treasurer Duane Yockey, 5th Director William Carney, Secretary Michael Rogers, ISU Planetarium Liaison Carl Wenning and TCAA member Brian Barling. The meeting was called to order at 6:06 PM. The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as published in *The Observer*.

A discussion as to how to elect a replacement director was held. It was decided to hold a special meeting for this purpose on the 12th of November, at 5:00 PM, at Panera's North (near Wal-Mart).

Duane noted that the NCRAL convention this year, in Appleton, WI, on the 21st and 22nd of April, will have a remarkable lineup of speakers, including Guy Consolmagno, Carolyn Porco, and Jack Schmitt, and that the TCAA ought to consider a field trip. NCRAL's publicity video will be posted on our web site.

Because of the increasing cost of insurance, Duane will talk to Eric Funk about liability insurance after the first of the year.

William noted that newly-donated 10" Schmidt-Cassegrain looks like a good scope, but that it needs a dew shield.

On November 5th, we will hold a special Public Observing Session to observe Mars, with a fallback date of the 7th. We will have a number of telescopes out, and repeating 10-minute lectures at the picnic shelter. Michael will handle publicity. Brochures and new POS schedules will be made available. Michael has revised the brochures, and Carl will propose a new POS for 2006. MOOS will be held one week prior to each of these sessions.

Plans for our Annual Meeting on the 11th of February, 2006, with Dr. Roger Phillips as our keynote speaker, will be finalized at our next BOD meeting. It is hoped that we can hold it at ISU, and Michael will ask Jean Memken to investigate. Plans to participate in the Festival of Trees were scrapped, because it didn't really seem beneficial/appropriate.

Regarding our ongoing attempts to improve communications with local science teachers, Michael will attempt to reformulate his "Letter to Science Teachers" (available on the web site) as a letter to the editor, and send it to the *Pantagraph*. Duane will check back with the Unit 5 Schools superintendent, and Michael will consult with science teacher and TCAA member Mark Cabaj.

William will deliver membership packets to the SGO, and the Board will examine them with an eye on



improving/revising them. It was suggested that as a “welcome to the club” gesture, board members physically deliver them to new members. William also noted that we have enough subscriptions to both *Sky & Telescope* and *Astronomy* to qualify for club discounts that the publishers offer. However, we were close to the minimum of 5, and that anyone with a non-club membership ought to consider switching to a club membership, for a savings of \$10.

It was thought that a survey, to see what our members think of our club, and ways in which it might be improved, should be conducted. Michael will consult with Jean, our resident statistician, in the creation of the survey, which will be presented to the Board before being sent out (both electronically and on paper). After the survey is completed, a retreat, to contemplate the future long-term direction of the club, ought to be pursued. Most Board of Directors meetings focus on short-term logistics, and a retreat might give us the opportunity to focus on the “big picture”. Questions of a second observatory, for instance,

might make a good retreat topic.

Speaking of observatories, wireless is now installed at the SGNC, and the signal is strong enough to reach the SGO. William will ensure that our desktop computers are properly networked. The question of purchasing eyepieces for the SGO arose again. It was decided that Carl and Michael would try out some Nagler eyepieces, and report back to the Board before a decision will be made on said purchase.

The issue of an electronic newsletter option was revisited. Carl noted that it would be cheaper, and Kal noted that it would be beneficial for the environment, if we distributed newsletters electronically and provided a link to SkyMap rather than Abrams for sky charts (the former being free). Carl will investigate costs and report back to the Board.

An Adult Ed program, being organized by Carl and the SGNC, will be held on the 7, 14, 21, and 28th of January, from 7-9 PM. It is hoped that TCAA members will help out.

Carl is going to draft a letter to the ISU Planetarium Director, urging him to outline how he plans to spend some of the \$2,935 that we raised through direct donations and the telescope raffle. Michael noted that some Star Date promos (the TCAA sponsors Star Date on WGLT, 89.1FM) refer listeners to the ISU Planetarium, but the answering machine is broken.

The meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM, and the next meeting will be held on the 21st of December at 6 PM, at the offices of Lewis, Yockey and Brown.

E/PO UPDATES

Carl Wenning and William Carney hosted a program and observing session for Troop 38 from Trinity Lutheran Grade School on Monday, October 17th. Scouts with family members amounted to approximately 50 in number. Carl presented a Voyager 4 simulation talk followed by a brief sky lecture. William hosted an observing session for participants, showing them the rising full moon. Because the Scouts were elementary school children, the program ran from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. only.

On Saturday, October 22nd, Carl and Kal Kumar held an open house from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at SGNC as part of the Nature Center’s Autumn Celebration. The open house consisted of views of a spotless sun, as well as Voyager 3.76 simulation software on the observatory’s computer. A total of 320 visitors got a chance to tour the SGO over the course of six hours. Carl and Kal distributed TCAA brochures, and promoted both the November 5th Mars session and the January 2006 adult education program.

Mike Rogers gave a presentation at Bloomington Public Library on October 25th. The presentation which began at 7 p.m. was titled, “How to Buy a Telescope.” The library staff led by Karen Moen promoted this, and there was a turnout of an even dozen. Following a 30-minute presentation with some good questions and answers, participants were invited to examine a wide variety of telescopes assembled by club members. The purpose of the presentation was to help would-be

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309-438-5007

telescope buyers make informed and intelligent decisions when it comes to purchasing telescopes and accessories. A variety of telescopes from several manufacturers were on display, and Mike's talk focused on the pros and cons of each. Attendees were able to see various telescopes, and made side-by-side comparisons so they had a better idea of what to look for when they head out to their local astronomy store. Assisting were William Carney, Dan Miller, Carl Wenning, Kal Kumar, and Mike's family including Jean, Benjamin, Sarah, and Jonathan. Former TCAA member Jim Baker stopped by after the session was over and remained speaking with members until nearly 9 p.m.

Mike Rogers spearheaded yet another activity for the opposition of Mars on the evening of Saturday, October 29th. Beginning at 8:30 p.m. he led a group of TCAAers in observations of Mars. About 25-30 members of the general public were in attendance. The viewing conditions were considered poor, and the seeing not much better. It is believed that dust storms on the Red Planet obscured much of the planet's surface and southern pole, though a bit of Syrtis Major was visible according to Mike. The following TCAAers assisted: Brian Barling, Dan and Chris Miller, Duane Yockey, Sharon MacDonald, and the rest of the Rogers-Memken family, Jean, Benjamin, Sarah, and Jonathan.

Carl Wenning will be presenting a four-part series dealing with astronomy to "Senior Professionals" of ISU on successive Wednesday mornings starting November 2nd. He'll use the opportunity to promote

the TCAA and its public observing sessions, as well as the January 2006 Adult Education program.

TCAA ROAD TRIP: NCRAL CONVENTION

On April 21-22, 2006, NEWSTAR and the North Central Region of the Astronomical League will hold a very special event in Appleton, WI. NEWSTAR will be celebrating its 20th anniversary and the NCRAL will convene its 60th convention. The TCAA Board of Directors has officially designated this event as "the TCAA road trip of the year." TCAA members are encouraged to make plans now to attend what will turn out to be a very memorable event. From authors to astronauts, speakers will be of interest to the astronomer and non-astronomer alike. The whole family is invited.

Located in the heart of beautiful downtown Appleton, the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel is within easy walking distance of museums, restaurants, one of a kind shopping and the brand new "Big Picture" large format theater where convention attendees will get a private screening of the film "Solar Max" on Friday evening. The convention is working with the Fox Cities Children's Museum to provide a "Family Fun Night" early Friday evening and activities on Saturday for those attending the convention with young children, a place to explore astronomy together. The Radisson Paper Valley Hotel indoor recreation area is open 24 hours a day and features a swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, mini-golf, and a complete Fitness

Center. Plan to get to Appleton by Friday afternoon for "Family Fun Night" at the museum.

"Exploring Astronomy: The Solar System" is the convention theme and each of the speakers have contributed to that enterprise. While it is possible this list of speakers could change at any time without notice, the tentative schedule of speakers for 2006 includes:

Guy Consolmagno and Dan Davis who are familiar to many of our members as the authors of *Turn Left At Orion*. Guy Consolmagno is also a Vatican astronomer and head curator of the Vatican's meteorite collection. His most recent book *Brother Astronomer* chronicles his experiences as a Jesuit priest and professional astronomer. Dan Davis received his Ph.D. from M.I.T. in 1983 and is now a professor of geophysics at SUNY Stony Brook. His research concerns the formation of mountain belts on Earth.

Ron Dantowitz is Director of the Clay Center Observatory at Dexter and Southfield Schools in Brookline, Massachusetts. He is best known to amateur astronomers for developing techniques for ultra-high resolution telescopic imaging. Ron's efforts have produced some of the sharpest ground-based optical images of the moon and planets to date, with resolutions approaching 0.1 second of arc. His amateur photos of the Mir Space station, space shuttle Atlantis and the X Prize winner using high-resolution video, have amazed astro-imagers the world over.

Dr. Carolyn Porco is a NASA imaging scientist. Dr. Porco received her PhD in 1983 from the California Institute of Technology in Planetary Science, as part of the Voyager

TCAA Treasurer's Report – October 2005

OPERATING FUND BALANCE – September 30, 2005 - \$ 1,243.47

Income

Kal Kumar (Dues Renewal) - \$ 40.00
Roy Ostberg (Dues Renewal) - \$ 25.00
Tim Winter (Dues Renewal) - \$ 40.00

Expenses

Rebecca Wenning (August Observer) - \$ 21.80

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

OBSERVATORY FUND BALANCE – September 30, 2005 - \$ 983.21

Income

Interest (July, Aug. & Sept.) - \$ 0.68
Donation (Optimist Club) - \$ 100.00

Expenses

None - \$ 0.00

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

TOTAL TCAA FUNDS – October 31, 2005 - \$ 2,410.56

**Respectfully submitted,
L. Duane Yockey, Treasurer**

Sugar Grove Observatory

Listing of Official Keyholders (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) Christopher Franklin (July 2005)

Carl Wenning (January 2004, renewed through 2005) Kal Kumar (renewed August 2005)

Brian Barling (February 2004, renewed through 2005)

Lenore Trainor (December 2004, renewed through 2005)

Kevin Brown (May 2005)

Sothilingam family (June 2005)

imaging team worked on Voyager's encounters with Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Currently Dr. Porco is the leader of the Cassini Science Imaging Team and a lead imaging scientist on the New Horizons Pluto/Kuiper Belt mission, to be launched in early 2006. In addition to being a Senior Research Scientist at the Space Science Institute in Boulder, Colorado, and an Adjunct Professor at both the University of Colorado and the University of Arizona she has made numerous appearances on radio and television explaining science to the general public. In late 1999, she was selected by the *Sunday London Times* as one of 18 scientific leaders of the 21st century.

Dr. Harrison "Jack" Schmitt is a well-known Apollo Astronaut. Dr. Schmitt explored the lunar surface as part of Apollo 17, the last manned mission to the moon. Selected as a scientist-astronaut by NASA, he was instrumental in providing the Apollo flight crews with detailed instruction in lunar navigation, geology, and feature recognition. Dr. Schmitt also assisted in the integration of scientific activities into the Apollo lunar missions and participated in research activities requiring geologic, petrographic, and stratigraphic analyses of samples returned from the moon by the Apollo missions. In addition, Dr. Schmitt served from 1977 to 1982 as a U.S. Senator for his home state

of New Mexico.

Because this convention will be a very special event, the hosts will be working very hard to see that all NCRAL societies are represented. This will provide a rare opportunity for region-wide networking of members and societies. To make this dream a reality, the hosts are urging all NCRAL member societies to insure at least one representative attend this convention. As you can see, the 2006 Convention in Appleton is going to be something truly special and not to be missed. Make plans now for attending this event.

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.

OBSERVING UPDATES

The following individuals are currently working on the specified observing awards available through the Astronomical League. This list 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
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Asteroid Award

William Carney	02
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Comet Award

William Carney	03
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If you are working on an observing award and want to gain fame and serve as an inspiration to your colleagues, please e-mail 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.





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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