

THE DARK SKY OBSERVER

The Dark Sky Observer is a publication of the North Jersey Astronomical Group (NJAG), whose purpose is to promote the study and knowledge of the science of astronomy.

The Dark Sky Observer needs your input! Letters, comments, suggestions, book and product reviews, and articles are welcomed and encouraged. Contact the editor at 973-340-5963, kdconod@earthlink.net, or at this address:

Dark Sky Observer

North Jersey Astronomical Group
P.O. Box 1472, Clifton, NJ 07015-1472

Contents © NJAG. No articles may be republished or reprinted without express written consent of the author and NJAG.

VISIT OUR WEB PAGE AT

<http://community.nj.com/cc/njag>.

Mary Lou West also maintains a web page at:
<http://www.csam.montclair.edu/~west/njag.html>

MEMBERSHIP

Dues are only \$15.00 per year (\$20.00 for family and \$10.00 for student memberships). Benefits of membership include: \$10 discount on subscriptions to "Sky & Telescope" or "Astronomy" magazines ("Sky & Telescope" subscribers also get a 10% discount on all books, maps, and products at Sky Publishing); a subscription to this newsletter; an e-mail list for the latest club and astronomy news; use of our dark sky sites; field trips to local planetariums, science centers, and star parties; a lending library of astronomical books; a Telescope Loan Program; and star parties for special celestial events.

Make checks out to the NJAG and mail to: North Jersey Astronomical Group, P.O. Box 1472, Clifton, NJ 07015-1472. If you have any questions regarding membership, contact our Acting Membership Committee Chair, Kevin Conod at: kdconod@earthlink.net or 973-340-5963.

UACNJ

The NJAG is a member of the United Astronomy Clubs of New Jersey (UACNJ), a consortium of more than a dozen astronomy clubs, united to better help support, coordinate, and communicate ideas between stargazers in and around the state.

The UACNJ operates an observatory at Jenny Jump State Forest near Hope, NJ which serves as the NJAG's dark sky site.

MARCH MEETING

The March meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 14. Our guest speaker will be Dr. Karl Hricko of Kean University. Dr. Hricko will give a slide presentation on archaeoastronomy, the study of the varied astronomical achievements of ancient peoples.

APRIL MEETING

The April meeting will be held on Wednesday, the 11th. Dr. Edward Groth of Princeton University will be our guest speaker. Dr. Groth will give a presentation about Optical SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence). The Optical SETI project at Princeton University searches nearby stars in an effort to detect brief, high-powered laser pulses that might signify the existence of extraterrestrial life in other solar systems. This project operates from the Fitz-Randolph Observatory on the Princeton campus and utilizes a recently restored 36" telescope.

Meetings begin at 8:00 p.m. in Richardson Hall, room 226, on the campus of Montclair State University. Call 973-680-8420 or see our web page for directions.

ANNUAL DINNER

Friday, March 23 at 7:30 p.m.

The NJAG's Annual Dinner will be held at the Russian Hall in Little Falls. The evening will feature an excellent "all you can eat" Buffet Dinner with unlimited beer, wine and soda, a guest speaker, and of course our annual Astrophotography Contest! There will be lots of door prizes including a Meade Ultrawide 14mm eyepiece, an 8mm Televue Plossl eyepiece, astronomical books, gift certificates, Astronomy and Space Illustrated magazine subscriptions, Starry Night Backyard software, plus much more!

Admission is \$25 per person (before March 15), \$30 per person at the door. Send a check made out to NJAG: Annual Dinner, NJAG, P.O. Box 1472, Clifton, NJ 07015

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Friday, March 23

The NJAG's annual Astrophotography contest will be held at the Annual Dinner on March 23. Our astrophotography contest is not really about competition but a great opportunity for the members to share their astronomical images. For rules and details on entering the contest, contact Angelo Restivo at agrestivo@aol.com or 201-358-1381.

STARLINE

For a weekly update on the night sky,
call the StarLine at 973-680-8420.



ELECTIONS

Elections had to be delayed again last month in order to give the Nomination Committee time to find a candidate for Treasurer. Volunteers are needed for officers and committees. If you are interested in nominating someone or yourself, contact the nominating committee:

President

- Jim Coughlin

Vice President

- Kevin Conod

Recording Secretary

- Jim Piombino

Corresponding Secretary

- Heidi Cramer

Trustee

- Angelo Restivo

Elections will be held at the next meeting so all members are encouraged to attend!

TELESCOPE NIGHTS

Thursdays at 8:00 p.m.

Thursday Nights are Telescope Nights at Montclair State! The general public is invited to look through our telescopes from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. Weather permitting telescopes will be set up in front of Richardson Hall (the math and science building). For directions, call 973-680-8420. Note: our telescopes can't see through clouds! Telescope Night will be canceled if the skies are not clear. There will be no Telescope Night on March 8 due to spring break at MSU.



S **TUMP THE ASTRONOMERS**

Have a question about astronomy?

Send it in to Kevin Conod at the address on page 1 or to kdconod@earthlink.net

and we'll try to have an answer in the next newsletter.

VERONA'S ASTRONOMY NIGHT

Joe Marzullo, North Jersey Astronomical Group

I partner with a middle school in Verona as an amateur astronomer through the Project Astro Nova program, originally sponsored by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. For a period of several weeks the children at Brookdale explore astronomical concepts through experiments and demonstrations that culminate in the astronomy night.

On Tuesday February 13, the school held their third annual Astronomy Night. The kids put on a show in the gym called "dance of the planets." The show is a set to music. It is a ballet interpreting cosmic events from the origin of the universe to the formation of the planets and a tour of the solar system. After the show many of the Brookdale students displayed what they had learned about astronomy in the past weeks. Divided in groups of three or four each, they would demonstrate to parents and visitor alike basic astronomical concepts ranging from the lunar phases to the procession of the equinoxes.

Meanwhile outside it was a mild and clear night, weather forecast notwithstanding. My 10" SCT telescope was set up in the ball field behind the school at about 7:00PM. I was joined a few minutes later by Mike Doyle and Jim Piombino. Mike brought another 10" SCT, while Jim came with a fine pair of binocular. As the show inside ended, parents and children started trickling outside towards our telescopes.

All visitors, young and old, let out "Oohs" and "Aahs" as they peeked through the eyepiece. Jim offered them wide field views of the Pleiades and the Orion nebula. All were extremely excited to see Venus, Jupiter and Saturn through the large scopes. The sharp view of Saturn drew the familiar accusations: "Ooh it looks fake!" and "It's a slide.. right?" We had about fifty guests enjoying the night sky with us. Many stuck around in the chilly evening to glean repeated views of the two gas giants and brilliant Venus. Finally as the evening grew cold and it became late, our last die-hard impromptu guests left. But not without first thanking Jim, Mike and I for the thrill of seeing the beauty of the universe first hand. As we were packing up our equipment I thought back to the children's excitement and their parents wonderment at seeing the planets. I could not help but think that, in a way, this is what being an amateur astronomer is all about.

PLANETWATCH

Saturday, March 17

Join us at Riker Hill Art Park in Livingston for a night of stargazing. Weather permitting, several large telescopes will be set up from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. to view Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and other wonders of the night sky!

Directions to Riker Hill Art Park
Riker Hill Art Park is located off Beaufort Ave. in Livingston.

FROM THE EAST

- Take the NJ Turnpike to Exit 15W or Garden State Parkway to Exit 145
- Take Route 280 West to Exit 4A
- Take Eisenhower Parkway south. Go straight at the first light.
- Cross the railroad tracks and go up the hill.
- Make a left onto Beaufort Ave.
- Make a right turn to continue on Beaufort. A few blocks down make a left at the sign for Riker Hill Art Park.
- Go straight at the stop sign. Keep to the right at the fork in the road.
- Telescopes will be set up in the field on your right at the very top of the hill.

FROM THE WEST

- Take Route 80 to Route 280.
- Route 280 East to Exit 4.
- Take Eisenhower Parkway south and follow directions above.

ASTRONOMERS NEEDED FOR PROJECT ASTRO NOVA

Meet The Best Audience You Have Ever Had: Our Children!

Wil van der Veen, Project Coordinator, Project Astro

This is what astronomers have said about Project ASTRO NOVA: "The kids quickly warmed up to me, I settled right in" "They were great, well behaved and so full of eager questions", "The questions never stopped, the thinking never stopped, and of course, the learning never stopped", " I learned just as much as the kids", "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my fascination of this subject with some very wonderful children", "Participating in Project ASTRO NOVA has been a real life-changing event", "A truly stellar experience".

If you live or work in New Jersey and like to share your enthusiasm and interest in astronomy with our youth, Project ASTRO NOVA is for you!

Each school year Project ASTRO NOVA pairs 2nd to 12th grade teachers and youth leaders with volunteer astronomers. In this school year we have 53 astronomers who are partnered with 75 enthusiastic and committed teachers. Some astronomers are paired with two teachers at the same school.

Project ASTRO NOVA prepares and helps its astronomers from start to finish. Astronomers first meet their partner teacher at the training workshop where they are engaged in effective classroom tested hands-on astronomy activities that meet the NJ State Science Standards. During the workshop partners develop a strategy for working together, in and out of the classroom, and start planning the astronomer's visits. We have scheduled workshops on August 21-22 (Tuesday and Wednesday) and August 24-25 (Friday and Saturday) at Raritan Valley Community College. Participating astronomers will be assigned to one of these two workshops.

Each partnership will receive a wide variety of materials and resources for use in their visits, including: The Astronomical Society of the Pacific's "The Universe at Your Fingertips" activity and resource notebook, articles about

recent astronomical developments, resource lists, access to audio-visual materials, tips on working with schools/groups and students, tips on addressing and working with preconceptions and learning styles, and more.

Class visits usually start in the fall and continue through the school year. Astronomers commit to make at least four visits to the same one or two classrooms or youth group. A class visit usually is 60-90 minutes. During these visits astronomers answer students' questions and lead or assist the teacher with astronomy activities. Examples of activities include: Making a Telescope, Stargazing, Exploring the Constellations, the Reason for Seasons, Modeling the Phases of the Moon, Making a Scale Model of our Solar System, Observing the Moons of Jupiter, Making a Comet, Life Cycles of Stars and the Origin of the Universe. Many of our astronomers are finding participating in Project ASTRO NOVA so rewarding and enjoyable that they make several additional visits.

Amateur astronomers who are interested to participate in Project ASTRO NOVA should request and fill out an Astronomer Volunteer Form. On this form, you will be asked for areas of astronomy that are of special interest to you and which grades/ages you prefer to work with. Based on this information, astronomers will be matched with compatible teachers or youth leaders near their home or work.

Astronomer Volunteer Forms and more information can be obtained from our website at <http://www.raritanval.edu/planetarium/astronova.html> or from Project ASTRO NOVA, Raritan Valley Community College, P.O. Box 3300, Somerville, NJ 08876, (908) 231-8805, fax (908) 526-7938, or email astro@raritanval.edu.

The deadline for submitting Astronomer Volunteer Forms is April 30.

The Dark Sky Observer

North Jersey Astronomical Group

P.O. Box 1472

Clifton, NJ 07015-1472



SKY CALENDAR

March

- 12 Moon near Spica
- 14 Venus almost directly above setting Sun.
- 15 Moon near Mars and Antares
- 20 Spring Equinox at 8:31 a.m.
- 25 Moon and Venus low in West
- 28 Moon near Saturn
- 29 Moon near Jupiter

April

- 4 Moon near Regulus
- 7 Moon near Spica
- 8 Jupiter passes Aldebaran
- 12 Moon near Antares and Mars
- 18 Saturn near Pleiades
- 25 Moon between Jupiter and Saturn
- 28 National Astronomy Day



Pistol Star and Nebula - Hubble Space Telescope