



SVAS OBSERVER

SACRAMENTO VALLEY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
FOUNDED IN 1945

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Great Lectures in Astronomy

The *Great Books* was a program to introduce the classics in grade school. Imagine now that you could sit in on a lecture by Aristotle or Galileo. How much fun would that be? Well, the great astronomers of our day are allowing you to do just that -- without the need to fill out paperwork, pay fees, or start the car. Three universities have put recordings of astronomy classes on line and available to the public at no cost. The audio portion is available as a podcast, increasing the chance that younger listeners will take an interest in astronomy. The files will run on any .mp3 player, laptop, or desktop personal computer.

Professor Richard Pogge at Ohio State University, Columbus teaches Astronomy 161, an *Introduction to the Solar System*, and Astronomy 162, an *Introduction to Stars, Galaxies, and the Universe*. The 2006 and 2007 lectures are available at these links. The web addresses are cumbersome to type in, but the SVAS electronic newsletter may solve this problem.

<http://www.astronomy.ohio-state.edu/~pogge/Ast161/Audio/>

<http://www.astronomy.ohio-state.edu/~pogge/Ast162/Audio/>

Professor Joshua Bloom at the University of California, Berkeley teaches Astronomy 10P, an *Introduction to General Astronomy*. Prof. Bloom has a more formal style and a need to share understanding with the audience. His 2006 and 2007 courses seek to play down the math content while presenting the big picture.

http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course_details.php?seriesid=1906978378

http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course_details.php?seriesid=1906978465

Professor Alex Filippenko at the University of California, Berkeley teaches Astronomy C10, an *Introduction to General Astronomy*. The 2006 and 2007 lectures are available as video and/or audio at these links. Prof. Filippenko has a casual style and conveys a great amount of information with gusto.

http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course_details.php?seriesid=1906978334

http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course_details.php?seriesid=1906978460

Berkeley is moving these resources to a new and improved site called "bospace" which does not support the Safari (Apple) browser. Users should visit the above non-bospace sites and save lecture files before UC "improves" things too much. (Simply right click and save as *.mp3.)

Another resource from Southern Illinois University is the *Astro-Cast* with a range of weekly lectures in astronomy and physics. Dr. Pamela Gay and Fraser Cain present each episode like a radio show. The current week is Episode 118, *Sky Surveys*. There is a huge inventory of lectures indexed by keyword and title at <http://www.astronomycast.com/>

No matter what your personal level of astronomy, from beginner to professional, these lectures will be interesting and informative. See what is going on in the classrooms of the other universities, how the best teachers present complex material, sometimes having to keep the students awake. There are upper level courses to be found when you wander around the websites. The lectures are copyrighted but may be downloaded for personal use. Moreover, there is the occasional reference to "educational free use" of materials. Many of these sites offer video as well as audio versions. Subscription by podcast is widely available. This feast is too good to last.

Dave Dietrich



Speaker Profile

Dr. Christopher P. McKay, Planetary Scientist with the Space Science Division of NASA Ames. Chris received his Ph.D. in Astrogeophysics from the University of Colorado in 1982 and has been a research scientist with the NASA Ames Research Center since that time. His current research focuses on the evolution of the solar system and the origin of life. He is also actively involved in planning for future Mars missions including human exploration. Chris been involved in research in Mars-like environments on Earth, traveling to the Antarctic dry valleys, Siberia, the Canadian Arctic, and the Atacama desert to study life in these Mars-like environments. He was a co-investigator on the Titan Huygens probe in 2005, the Mars Phoenix lander mission for 2007, and the Mars Science Lander mission for 2009.

The topic of his speech will be "Results of the Phoenix Mission to Mars and Analog sites on Earth". Phoenix landed at 68°N in the ice-rich ground on Mars and investigated the chemistry and geology of a polar site on Mars for the first time. The site is particularly interesting

March Elections

Our annual election will be coming soon! The election will be held at the March General Meeting. The slate is under development and will be announced at the January meeting, but you don't have to be on the slate in order to run for office. Any SVAS member who joined prior to February 2009 is eligible to vote and run for office. Any eligible member can run for President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer (1-year terms) or one of the five open director-at-large slots (2-year terms). If your date of joining is after February, 2009, you will have to wait until the next election to vote or run for office. Each membership casts one ballot, not necessarily each member. If two people are members under a single (family) membership, they may cast only one ballot, not one each.

Not all membership cards have gone out yet, and some contain errors, so eligibility to vote at the election will be determined, as always, by reference to the master membership roster.

Again, the people listed on the slate will be on the ballot, but additional eligible members are welcome to run for office. To add your name to the ballot, submit a petition signed by three SVAS members to the Secretary or the Board. Below is the applicable paragraph from our SVAS Special Rule Concerning Nomination Election Procedures (approved October 14, 2004).

"Members may submit additional nominations by written petition signed by 3 members. Such petitions may be submitted to the Board or the Secretary at the January General Meeting or anytime afterward until March 1st. Nominations will close at midnight on March 1st so that the final ballot can be prepared prior to the election. However, nominations can be reopened on the floor on election night by a majority vote of the membership."

The full text of our Bylaws and all Special Rules of Order (governing elections) are available on the SVAS website. After logging in, select Members, File Downloads, then Governing Documents. There is no particular form required for a petition, you can just write your name and what office you want to run for on any piece of paper, and get three members to sign it. Mail your petition to SVAS, P.O.

ELECTIONS, page 4

President's Perspective

Let me begin by first saying I hope everyone had a very Merry Xmas. 2008 was not the most pleasant of years and we survived some of the highest gasoline prices ever known. It was a real treat to fill up my tank for under \$50.00 for a change. I know it was extremely difficult for many people who were not able to afford those prices but still needed to find a way to work. We have all survived this round and hopefully the future holds happiness and continued low gas prices.

I am very confident of this next year and the many plans being made to celebrate the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA 2009). You will be hearing about many plans for this event in towns around the world. There will be many opportunities for the astronomical communities to display their skills in outreach during their efforts to show the general public the many reasons we love what we do. Liam McDaid is the go-to person if you want to help plan events. Contact Lynda Hall, Outreach Director, for future event dates and to volunteer. Call Margaret Minnick, School Star Party Coordinator, to become school star party volunteers.

This will be our year to shine in the eyes of children everywhere and a chance for their parents to possibly introduce their offspring to something new and interesting. Perhaps you will be the one to show a youngster the keys to the universe and kindle a desire like yours to discover the vastness and wonders of the cosmos. I will never forget those "oohs & aahs" when I

took my telescope to a class of sixth graders and heard the squeals of delight from them, their parents, and their teachers. Take a chance with Margaret and Lynda by showcasing your knowledge. No matter how little you think you know, you are still above the curve in astronomical smarts because you have a telescope (they don't) and know how to set it up.

The Annual General Membership Meeting is just around the corner on March 20th. If you haven't placed your name in the hat to run for a position on the board, now is your chance to do just that. I believe a few spots are still available for some of you to help drive this train we call the SVAS and make a difference. Contact the Nominations Committee and tell them you are ready to roll up your sleeves and get to work. It is much easier to accomplish goals when there are many ideas about how to attack a problem. Your SVAS needs you and welcomes your input. Step up and become a member of this well-oiled machine we fondly call the Board of Directors.

I would like to end with a vision for the future. I see our group getting back into the public eye. The event Margaret planned in downtown Sacramento for the conjunction was well attended by our cast of volunteers. Although we were greeted with fog and low clouds, the SVAS still made the 11 o'clock news on channel 3 that night. Our name is getting out there again and this year promises to show the Greater Sacramento Valley that we are still around. The SVAS has been a big part of my life since 1992 and I feel we can make 2009 one of our best years with help from all of you. Happy New Year to all!

Walt Heiges

Star-B-Q Presentations

Several Messier Catalog completion certificates were presented at this year's Star-B-Q on September 27th. Receiving the certificates were Melanie Smith, Bob Lea, and Jay Schudel, who completed observation of all the objects in the Messier Catalog pursuant to the guidelines established by the Messier Group, such as 8" maximum aperture and no GoTo control, similar to the limitations faced by French Astronomer Charles Messier.

Following Star-B-Q, it was revealed

that Sandi Lockhart and Katie Alexander have also observed all the Messier Catalog objects, and certificates of completion have been presented to them, as well.

*Tom Silver, Co-Coordinator
Messier Group*



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Professor Scopé

Hello everyone and welcome to 2009, the International Year of Astronomy. This coming year holds many wonderful opportunities for all of us to show the world why we do this thing called astronomy. You have most of the tools to wow those visitors that come to our events. I have explained the many telescopes available to amateurs and professionals alike. Over the last several months, I covered the types of choices you have. It is now up to you to decide what or which one is meant for you. You know how to align to the polar north so your telescopes will track properly.

I've given much thought to the direction we should go. Over the next several months, I will be covering eyepieces. There are many types of designs with some being the favorites of all. Many have particular functions to perform specialized tasks. If you have a favorite, I am sure I will get to it. There are so many kinds to discuss; I am not sure where to begin. Keep one thing in mind. Cost is very important but not necessary. I have purchased and used many brands that did not cause me to go into hock up to my eyebrows. These eyepieces may not have rivaled top-of-the-line models but they did serve me well over the years.

Obviously, I would love to spend the big bucks for a \$600.00 eyepiece if only I had it. I know how tight money is for all of us so my advice will be simple. Just like that new telescope you plan to purchase; buy as big a scope as you can afford. Purchase the eyepiece you can afford. As time goes by, the more expensive ones will come. As for my choices, the cheap side of me says these will work for me and have. I know the expensive types will outperform mine but I didn't break the bank to take them home either. Besides, using them at public events would put me into cardiac arrest if something were to happen to them. A few of my eyepieces have been used for professional purposes and did quite well. They were suitable for the task and did what they were meant to do for one brave Professor McDauid. So there you have it. You can survive with the less expensive models and actually compete with the high-priced spreads.

Stay tuned for the breakdown of many eyepieces and what they have or don't have in common. If you have questions about anything I have covered to date or something you would like me to cover, post a message on the Yahoo SVAS Members group to Professor Scopé. I will attempt to answer it in future segments or on the Yahoo group.

Professor Scopé

School Star Party

The outreach star party on December 17 at Natomas Park Elementary was, in my opinion, a solid success. We had at least 5 or 6 scopes set up. The favorite objects getting the "Wow!" comment seemed to be Jupiter and its 4 moons, and then a little later, the Andromeda Galaxy (at least at my telescope!). Venus was OK, but, as it was slightly less than a full sphere and very bright, it wasn't as impressive as if it had been in full crescent mode. The school's principal was there and said he thought the event was a great success. When I earlier mentioned to teacher Jen Mellor that we might need something for the kids to stand on, she was very helpful in bringing out a half dozen plastic milk crates that were put to good use!

At the height of the event, I'd estimate

40 to 60 parents and children onsite. One person commented that there seemed to be a line of about 20 people at each scope during the peak! Jupiter was such a big hit that I finally had to stop letting folks look at it as it actually set behind the roof of one of the school buildings

While the sky glow in such a suburban environment is always a bit challenging, the big fuzzy "cotton-ball" (one child's comment) of the core of Andromeda was clearly discernible (as were the smaller nearby satellite galaxies). Many folks were amazed to be actually able to see something like Andromeda, given that most had heard about Andromeda, but never actually seen it in person. As I said, "wow!" was the operative word out of many mouths! What fun and joy to bring our telescopes to these students and their parents! We wrapped up and packed up our scopes right around 7PM.

Duane Balch

References – Part 3

In previous months I've shared with you some favorite astronomy reference books found in my library. This month I must reach to the top of my bookshelf for a few books that I tend to select for general information or just plain enjoyable reading.

The first on my list is *The Observing Guide to the Messier Marathon*, by famed comet hunter Don Machholz (\$32.29 on Amazon.com). Most of us who have considered doing a one-night Messier journey are of two opinions: It is either going to be pretty easy with a little help from sky maps, or it is obviously far too difficult for anyone but an expert to undertake. Having tried it, but never quite succeeded, in years past I can assure you that it isn't easy. But Don's book will definitely iron out the wrinkles in your observing plan, and provide practical star charts for each object.

Also in the Messier genre is an old favorite, *The Messier Album*, by John Mallas & Evered Kreimer (\$9.99 on Amazon.com), a detailed pre-CCD era description of the Messier objects as seen through a 4" Unitron achromatic refractor. Aided by thumbnail sky maps, drawings, plus photos of each object taken with a 12" Newtonian reflector, this book provides a real insight into what the observer with a small scope should expect to see on an average dark night. I can't imagine how often I have read and re-read Mallas's descriptive prose. I advise you to acquire a copy while it is still available.

In 1993, a stargazing legend died. The passing of Walter Scott Houston, author of the Deep Sky Wonders column in *Sky & Telescope* for several decades, brought an end to some of the most descriptive and thought-provoking writing in the annuals of amateur astronomy. Scotty was never far from the action, challenging his readers to get outside and search for objects that were generally thought to be too faint, too small, or too transitory for amateurs to observe. In short, Scotty was an inspiration, goad, muse, and literary father to all who shivered in the cold to catch a glimpse of the faintest of fuzzies. In 1999, a collection of Scotty's writings was compiled, with commentaries by Stephan James O'Meara, under the title *Deep Sky Wonders* (In hardcover \$82.92!

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SCC Online Astronomy Lectures

Our own board member, Professor Liam McDaid, has his Astronomy 310 - The Solar System class as a streaming video at the website <http://web.scc.losrios.edu/de/archive/astr310>. His upcoming Astronomy 320 - Stars, Galaxies and Cosmology class will also be available as streaming video starting on January 20. Look for it under its name here: http://web.scc.losrios.edu/de/ITV_archive.

SVAS Website
Our current website address
is www.svas.org

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Classifieds

FOR SALE: Two Telescopes for sale: Orion 8 inch 1000 mm f4.9 reflector tube assly. with Telrad and 8x50 straight thru finder. Main tube assly. set rings included. \$400.00 value, asking \$340.

Orion AstroView 120 Achromatic refractor, 1000mm focal length f8. with Televue right angle correct image finder using replaceable eyepieces. All on EQ mount with dual access control drives, lengthened wire harness, electric focuser with remote Accufocus motor controller with driver disc, white solar filter, three element 2X ED barlow, extended due shield. Dielectric 2 inch diagonal (99% reflectivity), anti vibration pads. Orion Star Shoot Solar system color imager II with software (1280x1024 imaging). \$1030.00 value asking \$850, cal Tim Tingey @685-0935 or 208-0935.

Please let us know monthly if you want to renew your classified ad. E-mail chulbe@comcast.net.

Speaker

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for astrobiology because 5 million years ago the tilt of Mars' axis was 45° and the amount of sunlight reaching the Phoenix site at summer solstice is 2x the present value - Earth like levels. Understanding the microbial activity in high elevation dry permafrost in Antarctica provides a basis for considering habitability conditions on Mars during these periods of higher obliquity.

Elections

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Box 15274, Sacramento, 95851, or give it to any board member. Petitions and endorsements may also be E-mailed to any board member or nominations committee member (Tom Fry, Brad Call) by the deadline, but each endorsement must be from each supporter's own E-mail handler, showing his or her own E-mail address.

*Tom Silver, Chair
Nominations Committee
TandBSilver@aol.com*

References

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

new, \$27.98 used, in paperback \$14.96 from Amazon.com) Through many readings, this book will never fail to challenge and inspire you.

There are those of us who are constantly tinkering with our scopes in search of the perfect image. It is to these folks, that I recommend *Astronomy Hacks, Tips & Tools for Observing the Night Sky* by Robert & Barbara Thompson (\$16.47 on Amazon.com). Are you having trouble balancing your Dob, pronouncing constellation names, picking the right eyepiece or filter, computing magnification or field of view, aligning finder scopes, or a myriad of other questions, this book is for you.

Looking for inspiration to bundle up and venture into the cold night? Read *Starlight Nights: The Adventures of a Star-Gazer* by Leslie Peltier (\$13.57 on Amazon.com), and *Seeing in the Dark* by Timothy Ferris (\$11.20 on Amazon.com). These books will open your mind and understanding to why you do what you do out under the stars.

Well, I've exhausted my library favorites and now turn to you to share yours. Clear skies to you all, and may you have many hours of happy reading.

Forrest Lockhart

SVAS Calendar of Events

January

- 16 — **SVAS Board Meeting** (7 pm) CSUS Mendocino Hall (held just prior to the general meeting).
General Meeting (8 pm) CSUS Mendocino Hall, Room 1003. Speaker Dr. Chris McKay, Results of the Phoenix Mission to Mars and Analog sites on Earth.
- 24 — **Member Star Party**

February

- 20 — **SVAS Board Meeting** (7 pm) Discovery Museum Science and Space Center, 3615 Auburn Blvd., Sacramento.
General Meeting (8 pm) Discovery Museum S&SC. Speaker Dr. Jack Jonathan Lissauer, Kepler Mission.
- 28 — **Member Star Party**

March

- 20 — **SVAS Board Meeting** (7 pm) Discovery Museum Science and Space Center, 3615 Auburn Blvd., Sacramento.
General Meeting (8 pm) Discovery Museum S&SC. Speaker TBA.
- 28 — **Member Star Party**

WHOM TO CALL

For more information: www.svas.org • (916) SVAS-111

2008 SVAS OFFICERS:

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Doug Williams (916-944-8203)

Outreach Director

Lynda Hall (916-712-6247)

Observatory Director

Davin Enigl (916-989-8264)

WHERE TO MEET

General meetings are held on the third Friday of each month. Please see calendar for details.

Subscribe to the SVAS email list by going to the Yahoo group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/svas-members> and sending a request to join the group.

The SVAS Newsletter is published bi-monthly by and for the membership of the Sacramento Valley Astronomical Society. Except for individually copyrighted stories, permission is granted to other amateur astronomy organizations to reproduce in whole or in part for internal non-profit use, provided credit is given to the SVAS Newsletter and to authors of the reproduced materials.

Articles—Manuscripts and letters are welcome via email in Word or text format. Items may be e-mailed to Chris Hulbe at chulbe@comcast.net. Deadline for the following month's newsletter is the Wednesday following the SVAS General Meeting.

Advertising—Commercial non-personal advertising, business card through full page, is available. Contact Chris Hulbe at 967-3794 for information.

Classified advertising is free to members of SVAS. Submit ads to Chris Hulbe at 967-3794, chulbe@comcast.net.

Membership Renewal/ New Member Application

Yes! Please renew my membership, or make me a new member of the Sacramento Valley Astronomical Society.

1-year Renewal 1-year New Membership

General, \$35 — Enjoy monthly meetings, informative bi-monthly newsletters, and awe inspiring views of the universe at monthly star parties.

Student, \$20

Supporting, \$75

Contributing, \$150

Observatory, an additional \$40 — Enjoy all the benefits of a general membership plus use of the Henry Grieb Observatory (HGO). You must be a general member for 6 months or longer, and must be approved by the Board of Directors.

Additional Tax Deductible Donation: \$ _____

Tell us about yourself...

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (_____) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Please tell us where you obtained this form:

A star party at

A daytime event at

From a member.

Yes, I would like to be contacted about volunteering.

Yes, I would like to have my contact information listed on the SVAS Members Only Web Page.

No, I do not want the SVAS to contact me via email.

I wish to read the SVAS Newsletter on the web, and I opt out of receiving the printed newsletter.

I agree to abide by the terms and conditions* governing the use of the SVAS Special Use Permit Property and the SVAS constitution and bylaws. I understand that failure to abide can result in revocation of use privileges and SVAS membership.

Signed _____ Date _____

*A copy of the SVAS Rules of Operation and Regulations will be provided upon request to all new members. The rules are also available at www.svas.org



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