

Harford County Astronomical Society

Bel Air, Maryland
www.harfordastro.org



Volume 32 Issue 10

October 2006

Telescope Buyers' Workshop

Saturday, November 4, 2006, 7:30pm

132 Edgewood Hall

Harford County Community College

(See details below)

Public Star Parties (Open House):

Saturday, Oct. 28, 2006 at dusk

Saturday, November 25, 2006 at dusk

Club Calendar for 2006:

Meeting Night

December 2, 2006

Open House/Public Star Party

December 30, 2006

Please check the website for possible schedule updates and changes:

<http://www.harfordastro.org>

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Minutes of October HCAS Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by President Jim Garrett.

The minutes of the previous meeting (Sept. 9) were approved.

Tim Kamel gave the Treasurer's Report, which is posted below. He also added that we now have 51 members, but have lost 11 members, who did not renew.

Mark Kregel explained the work that needs to be done on the observatory dome. The dome is bent in some sections, and therefore cannot be rotated easily. As a result, the southern sky is unobservable, with or without motors.

A discussion about future projects concerning the observatory began.

Two projects were discussed at length:

1. Setting up a CCD camera for astrophotography.

The camera would also be able to display images from the scope on video screens and laptops in the meeting room. This would involve setting up an automated system for controlling telescope movements from inside the meeting room.

The automated control of the scope would allow handicapped visitors who can't climb the stairs to the scope to view through video screens or an overhead projector.

Tom Rusek suggested using funds now available in the treasury for improvements on the observatory.

Jim Garrett offered to donate one of his CCD cameras for a proof of concept demonstration.

A new computer for the observatory would have to be purchased to run the software. This could be purchased for about \$600.00.

Cathy Tingler voiced concern about how much use the CCD would get. Nobody uses the scope now, despite a considerable amount of time spent on training.

Roy Troxel suggested that the dome might be repaired first, as that would encourage more people to use the scope.

The date of Jan. 15 was suggested for completion of the CCD demonstration. However, no date could be set for completion of the dome's repair.

2. Moving the observing site from the parking lot area to the entrance of the observatory grounds, where there is less light pollution.

Mark Kregel proposed that we discuss the use of this area with representatives of the college. The lot is to the right of the gated entrance, surrounded by trees. There are some safety issues involved: The area is far

from the public parking area and the ground has numerous ruts. Some of the safety concerns sound trivial, but they might be compounded because of the darkness.

There is currently a limited view of the southern sky, so a tree-trimming would be necessary.

Tom Rusek will form a committee to inspect the grounds. Sal Robano of HCCC will help with the project as well. He will review both the land site and the observatory itself.

Two votes were taken:

1. A vote to do a feasibility study to see if we can convert the observatory into an astrophotography facility, and to set up a remote control system. All present voted "yea."
2. A vote to investigate the feasibility of using observatory grounds, instead of the high school parking area, for future open houses. All present voted "yea."

The flyers for the telescope buyers' workshop have been printed and are being distributed.

The usual business meeting for Nov. 4 will be eliminated in favor of the workshop. (If anyone has a problem with that, please contact Jim Garrett.)

Jim has prepared a guide for beginning astronomers. Copies will be available to visitors at the workshop.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm

Roy Troxel

Treasurer's Report – September

As of 9/1/06, balance in the checking account is \$5581.22.

We now have 51 paid members, just picked up a new one today when I went to the Post Office Box.

I have received out insurance policy. We are covered as of 9/15/2006.

Tim

Telescope Buyers Workshop

Harford County Community College
132 Edgewood Building
November 4, 2006
7:30 to 9:30pm

What is the Telescope Buyers Workshop?

The Telescope Buyers Workshop is an opportunity for individuals interested in astronomy to find information and resources, or to ask questions of experienced users about binoculars, telescopes, or other astronomically related equipment and accessories.

The workshop is specifically geared to the first-time buyers who may be considering an astronomically related purchase for themselves, or maybe as a Christmas gift for others. HCAS realizes the importance of the first time excitement and expectations with a new telescope or pair of binoculars under the night sky. We truly want to help ensure that experience is a positive one that will promote years of active interest in the universe that lies above our heads.

This is intended to be an open format. **Questions are welcome and encouraged.** However, due to time constraints, some answers may be deferred until after the presentation in order to cover all the material. One-on-one discussions with Society members may be continued after the presentation.

Among the topics discussed are the various kinds of scopes and their merits: Reflectors, refractors, Cassegrains and other hybrids. Various accessories like mounts, tripods, drives, eyepieces and filters will also be discussed and compared. Some HCAS members will be bringing their own scopes as examples.

What the Telescope Buyers Workshop is Not.

We are not here to promote specific manufacturers or businesses. HCAS is not related to, affiliated with, nor directly benefits from, any of the companies or manufacturers that will be discussed.

We want to present sound recommendations from seasoned individuals regarding equipment and resources that are available to the amateur astronomer. We will also recommend that beginners attend the HCAS sponsored Open House events to see for themselves the different scopes and how well they work.

If you would like to assist with the workshop, please contact Jim Garrett at jgarrett@clearviewcatv.net

Open House, September 30, 2006

On 9/30, we had an open house function. September had two 1st quarter moons with the open house scheduled for 9/2 being clouded out.

The prediction for the 30th was also quite poor. Weather forecast was for scattered thunderstorms and the Clear Sky Clock was predicting heavy overcast. However, I took a trip down to College Park in the afternoon and found a good part of the sky being clear. I was optimistic and kept watching the sky. Up here, the sky remainder mostly cloudy but there were patches of blue and I thought that if we could see the moon we could provide scope views.

I got to the Technical HS around 7:00 PM and, of course, not a soul. I pulled into the parking lot and decided that I would not set up and, if no one showed, I would leave around 7:30. Within 5 minutes a Boy Scout dad showed with his 8-year-old son. He said that there is a troop of about 9 more scouts and they might show (none did). I set up my ETX-70 and we had some views of the moon as it showed through some openings in the cloud cover. Dad and son, Kelvin and Connor, stayed for about a ½ hour and left at about 7:40.

Basically, as the night progressed, the sky started clearing and there were wide sections that were cloud free. Showing up that night were Beverly and Sarah Abremski, Mark Kregel, Jim Garrett and Franz Younganz. Grace Wyatt also came and brought along her aunt and uncle who were visiting from North Carolina. We also had a student from the Harford County Community College Astronomy Class come and set up his ETX-80 scope.

Depending on where the clouds were, we looked at the moon, Alberio, Mizar/Alcor, M13 and the Double Cluster in Perseus. We had no luck with the Andromeda Galaxy, it was washed out. We also tried for the Pleiades but no luck, too many clouds.

Overall, participation was light and sky conditions were poor with heavy moisture contents, thin clouds passing by and poor seeing. However, I would rather do this than sit home and watch TV any time.

Tim

Harford County Community College ASTRONOMY CLASS SUPPORT



Prof. George Thompson

The Harford County Community College has an astronomy program and the Fall Semester class has just started. We, as the Harford County Astronomical Society have supported this program for many years. This is a little more than just an outreach program; it is an expectation. We have had a close relationship with the College, use one of their classrooms for our monthly meetings, use the observatory and store our equipment there. The College also insures our activities while on College grounds.

The support is fairly simple. We set up telescopes at the Observatory and allow the students to observe the objects that they are being taught in class. Dr. George Thomson, the Astronomy Professor, takes the lead in talking with the students and lets us know where to point the scopes. The students arrive from their class at about 9:30 PM and observe till about 10:00 PM. We would plan on getting there shortly after 9:00 PM to set up and get ready. We have 3 Dob-mounted reflectors and one refractor in the closet at the observatory available for this use if you do not want to bring your own.

I supported the program during the Spring Semester and thoroughly enjoyed it. I brought my own scope since I was more comfortable with using it. I did some observing and got to interact with young and enthusiastic students and answer some basic questions about my scope and the night sky. Between the full moon nights, the weather and college closings, there was an average of less than two sessions per month. I plan to support the program again this year and am looking forward to it.

This semester, the astronomy class was a sell out, with over 30 students enrolled. If we have the same HCAS participation that we had last year, about 4 scopes each session, that will be about 8 students per scope. This is not a good ratio for only a half hour of observing.

So, we need more members to participate, folks. You do not need to participate in all the sessions, just a few. But if enough members do so, we will give the students a better experience and reduce the burden for those members that do come to support.

If you would like, I can serve as a coordinator and you can let me know which sessions you'd like to support. Please reach me on hkamel32@comcast.net or on my cell at 410-937-8008. Here is the schedule for the Fall Semester:

Tim Kamel

HCCC ASTRONOMY 151 Fall 2006 Observation Schedule

October

- Oct. 16** (moonless)
- Oct. 23** (moonless)
- Oct. 30** (1 day past 1st quarter)

November

- Nov. 6** (Full moon no session)
- Nov. 13** (moonless)
- Nov 18** (4:00am session at observatory)
- Nov 19** (4:00am session – to be held ONLY if session on preceding night is cancelled)
- Nov. 20** (moonless)
- Nov. 27** (1st quarter)

December

- Dec. 4** (Full moon – no session)
- Dec. 11** (moonless)
- Dec. 18** (Final exam – semester ends – no session)

HCCC Astronomy Class Support September 18, 2006



On 9/18, we held our first support functions for the HCCC astronomy class.

We arrived early to set up and hit our first snag, Security would not open the gate for us and we had to involve Dr. Thomson to get the gate opened.

This year, the enrollment in the class is 34 students and the first night was quite busy. I brought along my ETX-70 Refractor and the Club's 6" F/10.4 reflector. Mark brought his 14" Dob and Roy brought his 120mm Orion Refractor.

Viewing this night was not particularly good and the stars were dim and only the brighter ones were visible. Nonetheless, we were able to see Alberio, M13, the Double Cluster and M31.

HCCC Astronomy Class Support September 25, 2006

On 9/25, we held our second support function for the HCCC astronomy class and this night, sky conditions were much better than the previous week.

This week, Irv joined us with his 8" Dob. Mark had the 14" Dob and Roy the 120MM Refractor. This week I brought my ETX-125 Mak but had problems with the electronics. By the time I got it set up there was no time to set up the ETC-70, so we were again limited to 4 scopes for 30+ students.

We were again able to see Alberio, M13, the Double Cluster and M31. We were also able to snag M57

This group of students seems to be a bit more enthusiastic than the last semester. Several hung around after the class ended and one brought his scope and asked for help in setting it up. It is an ETX-80, very similar to the -70 that I have so I was able to show him how to do the alignment.



**HCCC Astronomy Class Support
October 2, 2006**

This week's session featured the moon, 2 days past 1st Quarter. Lots of "wows" tonight as many of the students had their first look at the moon through a scope, and saw the craters, rays, shadows and mountaintops sticking up from the dark side into the sunlight. Towards the end of the evening, we were also able to put the Pleiades into the scopes. The moon washed out any hope of seeing M31 and M13. But we were still able to see some double stars and the Double Cluster.

Participating this week were Irv, Mark, and Roy. Also joining us was Grace Wyatt. This week, I was able to get two scopes set up for a total of five scopes for the group. Also, one of the students brought his scope and set it up.

Sky conditions were fair to good with some clouds forming around 9:00 PM and, for the most part, dissipating by 9:30. The moon washed out some of the DSOs but our primary purpose this night was to check out the moon.

Again, 2-3 students hung around after the class, asking questions.

HCAS Outreach Programs



Fallston Library

Monday, Sept. 18th

The Outreach Program continued its local library visits on September 18th at the Fallston Library. Tom Rusek (and family) presented a program on the outer regions of our solar system. The program was attended by 15 to 20 people of all ages. Topics also included the new classification of planets, dwarf planets and moons. The Kuiper Belt and the Opik-Oort cloud regions were explained as well as the newly-discovered objects in these areas. Slides were shown using both old (35mm slide projector) and new (computer based projection) technologies. The prior lecture, held at the Bel Air Library in July, centered on the first billion years of our universe and the importance of the Hubble Space Telescope. It was attended by 40 to 50 people. The HCSA-OP will continue its library lectures at the Abingdon, Joppa, and Bel Air Libraries in the coming months.

Since we started doing the Outreach Program lecture series in May 1999, over 2000 people have attended. This turns out to be approximately 56 people per lecture, on average. If we include the Open Houses in our statistics, the number may reach 5000 people. Not bad, hey? Thanks to everyone over the years for your help with the outdoor programs. We REALLY ARE doing our part to educated our community as well as to show them the beauty of our universe.

Tom Rusek



The Next Outreach Programs:

Abingdon Library

Monday, October 23rd, Indoor program and outdoor program

Girl Scouts at Open House

Saturday, Oct. 28th for outdoor observing and at the observatory at 7pm for talk.

For further information, please contact Tom Rusek at rusek54@yahoo.com

New Members In October

Please welcome our newest members:

Raymond and Maryrita Wittstadt

Mid-Atlantic Star Party

October 16-22, 2006

Robbins, N.C.

For more details, visit:

<http://www.masp.org>

Swanfest - 2006

Swanfest is a family-oriented event that takes place at Swan Harbor Farms in Havre de Grace, Maryland. It includes crafts, food, games, live entertainment, activities for children, a chili contest, hay rides, mansion tours, and many vendors selling a wide range of items.

HCAS receives a booth for free. We give out information about astronomy, our club and let people take a look at the sun. This year's event took place on Sunday, October 15.



Interesting Web Sites

Courtesy Jim Garrett

Software:

Stellarium Planetarium <http://www.stellarium.org/>

Celestia Planetarium <http://www.shatters.net/celestia/>

Kstars <http://edu.kde.org/kstars/>

Intrastar <http://freeware.intrastar.net/planetarium.htm>

Magazines:

Astronomy Magazine <http://www.astronomy.com>

Sky & Telescope Magazine <http://skytonight.com/>

Other Resources:

Chesapeake Optics <http://www.chesapeakeoptics.com>

Hands On Optics <http://www.handsonoptics.com/>

Orion Telescopes <http://orion.telescopes.com/>

Sky Maps <http://www.skymaps.com/>

Astronomy Links <http://astronomylinks.com/>

Meade Telescopes <http://meade.telescopes.com>

Celestron Telescopes <http://www.celestron.com>

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