

Upcoming Events

Note: Meetings are at the Bettendorf Public Library @ 6:30 PM

March 7th

"Getting to the Heart of Pluto: More from New Horizons" Meeting

March 18th

Putnam Museum Family Night

March 21st

Business Meeting

April 4th

Presentation by OMI Meeting

April 18th

Business Meeting

May 2nd

Astronomy in Numismatics Meeting

May 16th

Business Meeting

Looking further ahead:

June 11th

Public Mars Viewing

Officers

President: Dale Hendricks
dhusna68@mchsi.com

Vice President: Bruce Brooker
brookers3@machlink.com

Secretary: Shawna Duncan
sduncan77@gmail.com

Treasurer: John Baker
johnbsys@aol.com

Director: Dana Taylor
dana@nelsonstaylor.com

Facilities: Dana Taylor
dana@nelsonstaylor.com

Outreach: Matt Neilssen
matt.neilssen@gmail.com

E. IA Star Party: Jeff Struve
pwrhsepro@aol.com

Meridian Editor: S. Duncan
sduncan77@gmail.com

March Skies

Matt Neilssen

Now we're talking! It's no secret that I am not a fan of winter. This month we finally get to kiss it goodbye! March comes in with an average low temp of 24F and ends with an average low of 36F. Sure, this time on year the dew point is starting to rise but I'll take it since the cloudiness chances of March decrease as the month wears on. Two other important things that go down this month are, the switch back to Daylight Savings Time and the Vernal Equinox. For daylight savings, remember that clocks go forward one hour at 2:00am on the 13th. This robs us of an hour of evening darkness. However, for a guy like me still working retail, it gives me another hour worth of set up time so I'm going to view it as a positive. The Vernal Equinox happens on the 19th at 11:30pm. At which point is officially Spring!

As I mentioned in February, Jupiter is where it's at this month from a planetary point of view. Jove reaches opposition on the 8th at 6:03pm. This isn't as big of a deal as the upcoming Mars opposition. Mars varies greatly in apparent size and brightness over the course of its 2ish year opposition cycle. Jove is more regularly visible. The King of Planets is also a heck of a lot bigger. The smallest that it will appear this year is around 31 arc seconds. Mars on the other hand will only get to around 19 arc seconds at its largest. The next super favorable opposition of Jove is in 2020. So this year I would rather focus on its moons. In this month, there will be 11 instances of Double Transit Shadows visible from Earth. Three of those are easily visible to us in the Quad Cities.

1. March 7th from 6:29pm - 8:00pm (Europa and Io)

2. March 14th from 9:22pm - 11:34pm (Io and Europa)

3. March 21st into the 22nd from 11:23pm-1:31am (Io & Europa)

I am especially pumped about the last one since the moons are going to be transiting very close to each other. A keen eye or the right imaging gear could potentially spot both moons and there shadows all within the face of Jupiter and all on the same side. If you want a comprehensive list of happenings with the Galilean Moons check out <http://www.projectpluto.com/jevent.htm>. They also have much, much more.

March is also the best month to try and track down as many Messier objects in one session as possible. If you've never run the Messier Marathon, you should. I can honestly say that it is the most fun I've ever had doing visual astronomy. This isn't the best year from what I've

read since the prime opportunity is dashed by the light of the Moon. However, this year you could look at it as you getting two shots at it. The first is just after the New Moon this month. Most places I've read mention the weekend of the 12th and 13th. The second will be the first weekend in April. The experts say that the full Marathon is only likely to be possible as far north as 27 degrees latitude. Don't let that stop you from trying!

Clear Skies!

Board Announcements

It is with deep regret that the board received Dale Hendricks resignation as President of the Board. Dale, thank you for your generosity of time and resources. Your service is greatly appreciated. Also, please take the time to read Matt's Outreach update, pages 2 and 3. We ask that you think about how you can help our efforts. And thank you, Matt, for the hours of research and planning you've already dedicated.

SAU/Menke

Jeff Struve

On Saturday, February 13th, Dr. Mitchell, Jeff Struve, and Karl Adlon took the new 14" Celestron Edge out to Menke Observatory for its initial installation. The 10" Meade SCT loaner scope from the club was taken down and the new Celestron mounted in its place. Unfortunately, the initial installation could not be completed as the new scope with accessories weighed more than the counterbalance weights that were purchased with the scope. Jeff sent Dr. Mitchell a link for ordering an additional weight. When the weight arrives, balancing and initial set up can be completed followed by any other adjustments necessary to insure proper alignment.



Jeff took the club's Meade SCT to Matt, who performed some much needed maintenance and Karl took the opportunity of this visit to place the motor cover mechanism that he modified over the drive of the 14" scope in the roll off roof building.

OUTREACH UPDATE

Matt Neilsen

I'm actually pretty nervous writing this since there is a lot of bad blood rolling around the club at the moment. As a member caught in the middle, I see this as a struggle to determine the direction of our organization going forward. I accepted this position as Outreach Coordinator so I could have an active role in shaping that direction. My vision is to bring the club's skill set up to the state of the art of amateur astronomy and to make our club outreach relevant to educational and community organizations so that we are viewed as a valuable asset to them. Doing those things will allow us to attract new members. I'm not just referring to those new to the hobby or folks with a passing interest in astronomy, either.

I refuse to believe that this area (a Combined Statistical Area of 475,000 according to the US Census Bureau) has just the membership of QCAS and PAC (around 60 individuals) for folks interested and invested in this hobby. I want to reach out to those unserved. I want to learn from their practice so that I can improve my own. I want to mine the talent of those folks in order to have a club capable of achieving things that it has thus far not been able to on its own, such as getting grant money for Sherman Park improvements. Even if we are not increasing membership, more meaningful partnerships will help us network to connect with people who may not be that into the hobby but are willing to help us improve our facilities because they see our value to the community.

If I am to succeed in this, it will be with help from all of you. In talking to the VP of Education at the Putnam and various teachers in and outside of this area, I found that the best way to become relevant is to offer outreach programs that cater to the education standards set forth by the state and the community school districts within them. I have looked through these and found that QCAS and its members are capable of providing such programs. If you would like to look into them, head over to the Common Core Standards web page to check them out. Having looked through them this last month or so, I have come up with one idea that I think we can capitalize on to get the ball rolling, light pollution. When you look through the standards for folks below high school age, nearly every mention of astronomy is tied to either history (literature standards) or ecology (science standards). Globeatnight.org has a lot of ready made presentations and educational kits ready for organizations just like ours. We can take advantage of this to get our feet wet with little effort. Shawna Duncan has joined me in looking through this trove and I would encourage you all to do the same, especially those with an educational background.

From a "state of the art" standpoint, it has been mentioned for years in various meetings that it would be cool to be able to broadcast the view through a telescope remotely to a display for lots of folks to see it at once. We will be able to do this sooner than later as we have all of the necessary equipment to make this happen - cameras, cables, scopes and connectivity. The last piece of the puzzle is software and execution. I have been looking into this for weeks and I ask that all of you do the same. I would like for us to not only have this capability for outreach but possibly for public events such as the Putnam, Credit Island, soccer field and also for Sherman Park at Public Open House.

It has also been mentioned for years that we need to have a "Telescopy 101" type of program for those uninitiated to the hobby. I agree, with a bit of a twist. I feel it is in our best interest to have a deliberate presentation about what an astronomy club is, why we are in one, and why you (the audience) should be in one too. This presentation would also involve a novice level introduction into how we practice visual astronomy with telescopes and binoculars. It's not only myself asking for this. The Bettendorf Library is interested as well. (With a July deadline!)

Having said all of this, here is the state of Outreach for the Quad Cities Astronomical Society.

March 18th 2016 - Putnam Family Night

The theme is "Stars and Constellations". The VP of the Putnam is interested in our participation in a sort of Open House for the Putnam for the second time. She is also interested in an ongoing partnership with QCAS for our potential to provide content involving Citizen Science, Historical Relevance, and Community Education. We plan to hit two of these marks by having resources available from the Globe at Night organization. This is a Citizen Science activity that catalogs the changes in sky glow around the world on a yearly basis. The method of participation is the identification of prominent constellations and reporting the stars visible within them via web page or a mobile app (Android). There is also an application available for iOS that uses the camera to give quantitative sky glow measurements. We will need to come up with a display for this as well as have a general knowledge of the project to be able to speak to it with the public.

I am also looking to get access to the projector screen on the east wall of the lobby in the museum/IMAX area. This screen will be useful for the projection of views through a telescope situated outside the Putnam if weather permits. From the outside, I would like to have a representation of the different telescope types available to amateur astronomers using club owned equipment if possible. (Specifically the 10" Meade Dobsonian and Celestron 8SE) In the event that weather is not conducive to astronomical observing, we will have a presentation of the prominent constellations of that month to project upon the screen. This will consist of views via planetarium software and short written descriptions of them accompanied by relevant location / star lore / targets within them.

Any and all other ideas relevant to the theme of "Stars and Constellations" would be appreciated. Please email or call me. I have yet to present a nailed down plan to Octavia as of this writing.

June 11th 2016 - Credit Island Mars Opposition Viewing

This one should be fun. We will be getting many scopes as possible to Credit Island for viewing the planets and whatever other targets we can resolve through the downtown light pollution. We will have access to the Credit Island Lodge that night also. From inside the Lodge we'll be able to give a Mars Opposition presentation no matter the cloud situation. I encourage everyone with the ability to image Mars (and the other planets) to do so beforehand in order to fill that presentation with content. If you have any input as to what content you would like to see in this presentation, please get in touch with me before the end of April. This event will also be advertised in the Davenport Parks and Recreation Spring/Summer Guide. We were lucky enough to have a pro graphic designer donate her talent to us in coming up with the ad for this. We are also using Dale's association with the Friends of Credit Island to help in promoting it and, hopefully, gaining their attendance. We have the potential for a really nice turn out on this one folks. Let's nail it!

June / July 2016 - Bettendorf Library "Intro to Amateur Astronomy"

The Library is requesting that we give a presentation about our hobby to its members. The cool part about this is that they are looking to encourage their members to bring their own gear for viewing with experienced folks like us. This one is where I would like to see us having a "What is Amateur Astronomy / Telescoping 101" type presentation. The library has mentioned us doing the presentation in a room which has a patio next to it. If we can do our thing such that we explain to them how to use a scope and then walk outdoors and have them try it, I think we would accomplish what the library is looking for. Personally, this is the sort of astronomy presentation I would love to have attended when I was getting into this hobby 10 years ago.

As I mentioned before, I cannot get all of this together on my own. I need as much participation as I can get from as many members as possible to pull off the three things that we have lined up. I understand that for a group of our size, there is a whole lot of commitment we are already making. We currently have two meetings per month that need content. We have upcoming monthly open houses that need, at minimum, two member's to participate. We have commitments to St. Ambrose that require our attention. On top of all of that, we have a desire to get involved in as much outreach as possible. I want to know from all of you, how much is too much? In directing our outreach moving forward, I want to make sure that we are not over reaching this club's membership's capacity and willingness to participate in these activities. I would like everyone to think about this leading up of our next business meeting. I do want us to step up our game on this, but I do not want to over commit us in the process. After all, we are here to enjoy this hobby and each other's interest in it.