

Feburary 2017 Editor - Jack Fritz

The St. Petersburg Astronomy Club, has been the center of family astronomy in the Tampa Bay Area for decades. Its 281 adult members are dedicated to promoting and sharing the wonders and science of astronomy. We host dark-sky and local star parties, telescope-making workshops, science lectures, astronomy lectures, educational outreach sessions and much more.

President's Message

KYLE BRINKMAN

What a great time we had at the OBS! We had a record registration and very good attendance. The first two nights had some good viewing. I'm told that Friday night had some good viewing in the early morning hours. I've



been hearing that many of us had a great time with some of the familiar activities and a new addition of the social hour. We even received the first reports on the success of Antonio Paris' radio astronomy experiment. Be on the lookout for the published findings later in the year.

We owe some sincere gratitude to those who made this happen. Jack Fritz has been the main organizer. Wally Vazquez was recognized as an outstanding member for his work in preparation for the OBS. He has been soliciting the door prizes which we all love. In fact, the door prizes seem to be the biggest gathering of the week. There were others helping out as well, making this a fun event for everyone.

There are star parties failing in many clubs due to the lack of volunteers who make these things happen. SPAC has been growing

and we welcome all our new members. I'd like to urge us all to find a way to be involved. Being involved will enrich your membership. You don't have to plan a whole star party. Bringing a scope to an outreach event is not a lifetime commitment. We could use some help hosting our monthly meetings. There are people in our club who could be a presenter at our meetings. It would be perfectly alright to have a vote between two candidates at our election of officers.

I look forward to seeing you soon at our next meeting. Keep looking up!

New Members

We would like to welcome Don & Rebecca Streib, Leeann Muszynski, Eric Grossman & Jacquelyn Grahm, Shane Eigell, Steve Hill and Fred & Courtney Gauthier to our family of members.

General Meeting

This month's general meeting will take place on Friday, February 24^{th} , at 8:00 PM, at the Science Center of Pinellas County, 7701 22^{nd} Ave. N, St. Petersburg.

<u>Main Program</u> - Kelly Anderson, our roving reporter, will present highlights from this year's OBS.

That will be followed by an observing session. Bring your telescopes.

Upcoming Programs

March - Shirley Vuille will present: Forensic Evidence For Planet 9.

March 25th - Spring Picnic at Withlacoochee. Please refer to the SPAC calendar on the website.

Outreach

JIM HUNTER

After the cloudy nights of viewing at OBS, we had four straight nights of beautiful, clear and initially dry skies.

At Northwest Elementary, Kelly, Tom and I had a great night. Lots of parents and about 200 kids. At Jimmie Keel Kelly, Wally and I had about 100 viewers. At the Literacy Academy Kelly, Wally and I had about 50 viewers.

Tom, Wally, Steve, a new member, Eric Grossman, and I set up at Brooker Creek. It was a very festive night, although the moon was getting bright. Folks sitting in chairs, even a small picnic - good times.

For members who don't do Outreach, it is very rewarding, as you get a lot of newbies. If you are a new member and have not decided on your first scope, please join us as we have several types and sizes of scopes. It is a great place to "comparison shop" scopes.

Scott Walsh provides news of the recent Gulfport Sidewalk Event.

The weather was crisp and clear for SPAC's Outreach sidewalk viewing last Friday. SPAC members Diane and Scott Walsh hosted this event. Gulfport was jammed packed with Snowbirds enjoying warm weather, good food, and entertainment. I was bombarded with eager patrons, approx. 250, wanting to get a look at the Moon, Venus, Mars and M42. All in all, a good night at Gulfport.

March Astronomical Events

STEVE ROBBINS

Wednesday, March 1st Neptune is at conjunction with the Sun.

On Saturday, March 4^{th} Aldebaran will be 0.2° south of the Moon.

Monday, March 6th Mercury is at superior conjunction with the Sun, on the far side and about as far away from the Earth as it can get.

Friday, March 10th find Regulus 0.9° north of the Moon.

Monday, March 20th is the Vernal Equinox. Saturday, March 25th Venus is at inferior conjunction, between the Earth and Sun, as close as it can get. However it will not be seen as it will be a "new" Venus, phase 0%.

March's full Moon is the Full Worm Moon. The ground warms up, the birds come to feed on the surfacing worms. Yum!

Moon:

- 5th Moon at First Quarter
- > 12th Full Moon
- > 20th Moon at Third Quarter
- > 27th New Moon



Ron Jones receives this year's John Dobson award

St. Petersburg Astronomy Club Examiner 2017Orange Blossom Star Party Special Review

KELLY ANDERSON

This year's edition of our Wintery Star Festival was a mixed bag of viewing opportunities, a bit chilly at times, but filled with events to amaze and delight the senses. We had 101 astronomers, plus spouses and kiddies, join us for a great week.

Some of us were thinking of arriving on the previous Sunday to give us ample time to set up and prepare. A close look at the weather report disabused us of any inclination to do that. With wind gusts more than 50 miles per hour, heavy rain and scary lightning we stayed home. A little discretion goes a long way.

Monday was clearing, but still windy. Nothing near 50 mph, but still a tad much to put up the Hospitality and Reception tents. We did get some things done that weren't dependent on calmer climes. Your Stalwart Reporter managed to set up his observatory tent without providing too much entertainment for observers, but extra guy ropes were needed to keep the structure from blowing into the depths of the Green Swamp. The winds calmed and the skies cleared at sunset, providing a very good night for astronomy.

Scattered clouds returned Tuesday morning, along with fresh breezes, but not nearly as gusty as Monday. The club tents went up without undue tribulation, and the tent contractor had no difficulty erecting the Lecture and Mirror Lab/Theater shelters. Those ever-important Porto-Lets arrived and were placed into immediate service. We were becoming a village with all the necessities of civilized life. The "Kickin Caribbean" food wagon arrived and set up shop. Seeing was even better Tuesday night. A larger-than-usual number of attendees had arrived early, so the viewing crowd was much bigger than the previous night.



Our Viewing Field

Wednesday, the official opening of OBS 2017! Kyle Brinkman conducted an imaging presentation on "Target Selection, Frame, and Focus" for the Image Academy. The club hosted a social hour later that afternoon with a dazzling display of delectable comestibles. Seeing started out as good-to-excellent, but precisely at 10:00 o'clock the astronomy was abruptly halted with a sudden appearance of a total overcast. It seemed to come out of nowhere! We knew another front was coming and hoped it would pass quickly bringing clear skies behind. Yeah, we really thought that might happen.

Thursday activities began with a Bicycle Trail Ride, led by your Stalwart Reporter. The weather was perfect, clear and cool with no wind. Half of us went up the hill to the Tower then

around the Park, while the other half went out of the Park and across the one-lane bridge over the Withlacoochee to the Green Swamp. Wonderful riding trails over there.

The Image Academy that afternoon was led by Bob Stelmock, who showed us how to do "Easy Peasy Video Photography." Chap Percival, noted author of Go See the Eclipse and Bring a Kid With You gave us a scintillating talk about ... you guessed it ... seeing the eclipse scheduled to appear next August. After a social hour and dinner, we were treated to a magnificent view of ... more clouds!

Friday Kyle Brinkman led the Telescope Walkabout where we had the opportunity to see a variety of telescopes and chat about them with their operators. There was a lot of interest, and the



Our future astronomer.

iterest, and the walkabout went over the allotted hour. This necessitated some to leave early to



President Kyle Brinkman surveys his domain.

join the Ladies Luncheon in downtown Dade City.

The Ladies Luncheon is always a big hit. They reported having a great time of food and fellowship. Several of the ladies elected to stay in Dade City for shopping and a preview of the annual Dade City Cumquat Festival. No, really. There is such a thing, and it's a big deal to the Dade City folks.

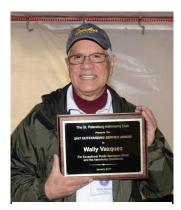
Antonio Paris, our professional astronomer par excellence gave an interesting presentation on the "Wow Signal." His working hypothesis is that the signal from the general direction of Sagittarius in the '70s that caused such a stir may actually have come from a comet. There were two comets, unknown to science at the time, that are now known to have been in the same general direction as the Wow, and perhaps one of them was the real source of the signal, rather than a product of an extraterrestrial intelligence as had been widely speculated. His radio telescope equipment has been thoroughly tested and is ready to go. In February, he'll be able to see if his hypothesis is correct. Pins and needles, Antonio. Pins and needles.

Antonio was followed by John O'Neill who presented Part Three of the Image Academy. He talked about enhancing images with Adobe PhotoShop®. He was followed by the evening social hour. After dinner, we, star gazers, were able to gaze fondly at... more clouds! Shucks, darn, gee whiz, golly! Maybe Saturday night?

Saturday began with a nature walk with Mike Davis, who led our intrepid walkers through the wilds and woods of the Park. Always a fun and educational event. They returned in time for the annual Swap Table, where astronomy junk was turned into astronomy treasures. After lunch, the Hee-Haw Hayride departed for a trip across the Withlacoochee River and along the Green Swamp.



Our attendees gather just before the Wrap-Up



Wally Vazques received our 2016 Outstanding Service Award

The traditional Closing Program began at 2:00 o'clock with the traditional group photo, followed by the traditional door prizes. The winner of the Dobson Award was not in attendance and will be announced at a later date. There was a special "Outstanding Service Award" presented to Wally Vazquez for superlative contributions to the club during the past year. Congrats, Wally!

In a break from tradition, there were three awards, rather than the traditional two, presented for the astrophotography contest this

year. In addition to the "Best Deep Field" and "Best Wide Field," an "Honorable Mention" for either category was added. Kyle Brinkman won the latter for his image of Bernard 33 (the Horsehead Nebula), while both the

Deep Field and Wide Field awards were won by ... well ... your Stalwart Reporter! Talk about a shock! My Deep Field image was of Messier 42 and Sharpless 279, (the Orion and Running Man Nebulae). The Wide Field image is of NGC 2024 and Bernard 33 (the Flame and Horsehead Nebulae), with the star Alnitak at center frame. Here are the submissions:



Kelly Anderson receives
both the Wide Field and
Deep Field
Astrophotography Awards.



Kelly Anderson's Award Winning Deep Field Image
The Great Orion & Running Man Nebulae

Kelly's Award Winning Wide Field Image
The Flame & Horsehead Nebulae



Kyle Brinkman's Honorable Mention Horsehead Nebula

Unfortunately, the weather forced the cancellation of the Saturday Night Hayride, and because the chance of any observing was slim to none, several of our members decided to head home Saturday evening. A larger contingent decided to stay one more night and enjoy the social activities in dry areas. We were visited with episodic rain showers, and the temperature wasn't particularly conducive to shorts and t-shirts, so that chased everyone indoors, but hey! We only do this once a year. Why let a little weather keep us down?

Mark your calendars. The 2018 OBS is scheduled for February 7^{th} - 11^{th} .

SPAC Business Meeting



Our next meeting is Wednesday, March 8th, at 8:00 PM at the Science Center. All interested members are invited to attend. All club business decisions are made at the business meeting so as not to encumber the general meeting.

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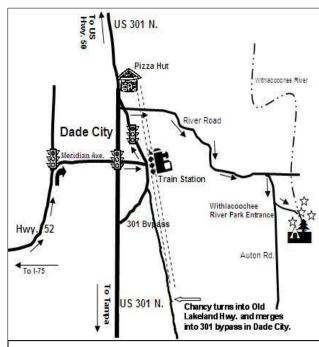
Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

Our next New Moon Weekend falls on February 24^{th} and 25^{th} .

The park gate is locked at Sundown, so you will need to arrive before then. The year-round camping fee with electrical use is \$10/night for club members and \$20 for non-

members. Tent camping without electric is \$5/night.

Be reminded that if you are not camping, you must pay the \$2/vehicle fee. Vehicles displaying the handicap parking tag are exempt. For further information, contact Bill or Nancy Huff. starhopr3@msn.com or 813 621-3606.



Withlacoochee River Park - Dade City, FL
Detailed directions can be found at:
www.StPeteAstronomyClub.org



15406 Stonecreek Lane Tampa, FL 33613

SPAC, INC. MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in St. Petersburg Astronomy Club, Inc. is open to anyone, regardless of age, who is interested in astronomy. Dues are considered donations and are non-refundable. Membership options are available as listed below:

To join or renew your membership:

Complete the following form and return it with your payment to: Jim Hunter - Treasurer, 17316 Oak Ledge Dr., Lutz, FL 33549-7626 - Telephone number (813) 909-7013 (checks should be made payable to SPAC, Inc.)

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