

The River Ridge Observer

The newsletter of the *Central Arkansas Astronomical Society*

FIRST EDITION

JANUARY 2011

Welcome to the first edition of **The River Ridge Observer**. This newsletter is meant to give you the latest and greatest news and information about CAAS and its members.

“CSI: URANIBORG!” AT JANURAY 8TH GENERAL MEETING

Please join CAAS at its first meeting of 2011 on January 8th at 7 p.m. in the classroom on the grounds of the River Ridge Observatory. Please email info@caasastro.org if you need the link and password to the directions. After a short business meeting, new President Jim Fisher will make a presentation on the work and the lives of Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe. Based upon the book Heavenly Intrigue: Johannes Kepler, Tycho Brahe and the Murder Behind One of History's Greatest Scientific Discoveries, by Joshua Gilder and Anne-Lee Gilder, Jim will present an overview of Kepler and Brahe's sentential work that laid the foundation for the physics of the solar system and also the very colorful lives of these two giants of astronomy.

Weather permitting we will adjourn to observing field for fun and fellowship under the stars. Let's have a winter pot-luck just before the meeting (6:30 ish). If you are able, please bring a pot of chili or hot soup or crackers, snacks, drinks, etc. and come join the fun.

OBSERVATORY SECURITY POLICY

Use of the River Ridge Observatory and the facilities on the grounds is a privilege of CAAS membership. Recently there have been a few minor incidents where the buildings on the grounds and the main gate were not properly secured by the last person leaving the observatory grounds (in retrospect and using aging brain cells, the author believes he may have been one of the aforementioned “guilty” last persons). Fortunately, there were NO incidents of vandalism or theft.

If you are the last one to leave the Observatory grounds, you MUST do the following:

1. Turn off and unplug the classroom air conditioner and heater. Do not assume it is off if it is not running.
2. Unplug the power strips under the table to protect equipment from power surges.
3. Turn off all lighting to include the red lights.
4. Lock all doors to include the equipment room. Place bar over rest room/storage building and lock the hasp. Check all doors to the classroom and main storage buildings even if you did not use those buildings that night.
5. In cold weather months, turn off the water (valve on right beside the steps to deck).
6. Close and lock entrance gate. Place block under the center of the gate for extra support.

DARRELL HEATH NAMED JPL SOLAR SYSTEM AMBASSADOR

Congratulations to our own Darrell Heath on being selected as a NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory Solar System Ambassador for 2011! "Ambassador" Darrell will serve as a volunteer on behalf of NASA and will communicate the excitement of JPL's space exploration missions and information about recent discoveries to people in our community. We are hoping that Darrell will make one his first a presentation as a Solar System Ambassador at the National Astronomy Day program on May 7th at Pinnacle Mountain State Park.

More information on the JPL Ambassadors program may be found at:

<http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/ambassador/>

ANNOUNCING FUTURE ASTRONOMER CHARLOTTE ANN KRUG!

Congratulations to Amanda and Kevin Krug on the recent birth of their daughter Charlotte Ann Krug! Kevin reports that Charlotte weighed 8-8 and was 22" long at birth. Mom Amanda is doing well, her brothers love her a lot, and Daddy is very, very happy. Everyone hopes to see Charlotte at the River Ridge Observatory helping Dad with his telescope very soon.

COMING SOON: MSRAL CON 2011

The Mid-States Region of the Astronomical League (MSRAL) will host its annual convention on Friday, May 20 and Saturday May 21, 2011 at Mulberry Mountain Lodging and Events north of Ozark, Arkansas, which boasts some of the darkest skies in Arkansas. Our friends at Arkansas – Oklahoma Astronomical Society are hosting the event, but they are counting on our assistance and support. Please mark your calendar to attend. If you are either interesting in presenting a paper to the conference attendees or volunteering your time in assisting with planning the event or working during the event itself, please send an email to AOAS President Dave Grosvold at dgrosvold@aoas.org and to Jim Fisher at jrfisher7@gmail.com.

JANUARY 2011 OBSERVING HIGHLIGHTS

All month – Jupiter reigns over the evening sky high in the southwest at -2.3 magnitude. Brilliant Venus heralds each new day in the southeast in the pre-dawn sky.

Jan 3rd – Uranus (mag. 5.9) is 0.5 degrees north of Jupiter (telescopic)

Jan 4th – New Moon

Jan 4th – Quadrantid meteor shower in pre-dawn sky

Jan 9th and Jan 10th – Waxing crescent Moon near Jupiter

Jan 9th – Callisto and Europa pass in front of Jupiter, 9:49 – 10:13 p.m. (telescopic)

Jan 12th – First Quarter Moon

Jan 19th – Full Moon

Jan 25th – Moon, Saturn, and Spica form a triangle in pre-dawn sky

Jan 26th – Last-Quarter Moon

THOUGHTS FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT – THE BEST PART OF ASTRONOMY

For those of you who cannot remember the year 1971, the Vietnam War raged, Apollo missions number 14 and 15 successfully continued human exploration of the moon, the Ed Sullivan Show ended its run on CBS, Walt Disney World opened, John Lennon's "Imagine" was the number 1 song, and I went to Boy Scout Camp 2 months shy of my 13th birthday. Back in those days, the Boy Scout camp was just a few miles southwest of Benton which was a truly small and relatively light free pollution free town at the time. I signed up for the astronomy merit badge class and was immediately hooked by both the beauty and science of astronomy.

Later that summer I took an astronomy class at the old Museum of Science and Natural History in MacArthur Park. That fall at the urging the Museum's astronomy curator Larry Sessions (and also a UALR physics major at the time), I joined an organization which was then known as the Mid-South Astronomical Research Society (MARS).

In my early years as a member of MARS, I met and befriended many interesting and wonderful amateur astronomers. One was a young high school science teacher named Carl Freyaldenhoven, who I hope all you know, respect and love as much as I do. I also met another fellow my own age named Robert Brown, who today remains one of my closest friends. Robert attends many of the Pinnacle Mt. S.P. star parties with his classic Celestron C-8. Later in the 1970's, I met another fellow near my own age named Jim Dixon. Larry Sessions, the museum astronomy instructor who invited to join MARS, was a club officer at various times in the 70's. Today Larry teaches astronomy at the Community College of Aurora, Colorado, lectures on astronomy in and around Denver, and writes for various science blogs to include EarthSky.org. Larry and I also are Facebook friends.

I was active in MARS through most of my high school years which ended with my graduation in May of 1977. After that "life happened" and I slipped away from being an active astronomer. I went to college and then law school; entered a busy career field; started a family; moved to Denver, and still later moved to the Illinois suburbs of St. Louis. Astronomy remained an interest but through those years not the passion of my youth.

Then one evening not long after moving to Highland, Illinois in 1996, I stepped out onto the deck of my new house. My house was situated on the southern end of town and was literally a stone's throw from seemingly endless acres of corn and soybeans. Above the corn field behind my house in an inky black sky Scorpius and Sagittarius posed with the entire summer Milky Way stretched out above them. The next spring, Comet Hale-Bopp appeared and looked as if one could almost reach up and pluck it from the sky.

For the second time in my life I was hooked. This time for good.

In 2004, I returned to Little Rock partially for family reasons. My dad died in late 2005, so I did not re-join the astronomy club formerly known as MARS until the spring of 2006. Although I waited I am glad I did.

The thrill of hunting down beautiful, faint nebulae, distance galaxies, observing the moons of Jupiter transit the planet, or observing Auroras and eclipses are the second best part of astronomy. The friendships made along the star trails are the first.

Clear, dark skies in 2011! - *Jim Fisher*