



VIA STELLARIS

www.vbas.org

The Monthly Newsletter of the Von Braun Astronomical Society

VBAS Highlights for September

Public Programs for September

Our next member’s meeting will be held on Friday, September 21st at 7:30 p.m., after the new monthly Marketplace event which will start at 7 p.m. Marketplace is a thirty minute period before our Members’ Meetings where Members gather to enjoy pizza and soft drinks while looking over any astronomy related items that other Members are offering for sale. For the member meeting, after discussing upcoming VBAS & Astronomy related activities of interest to our Members, we’ll watch “Wetumpka Impact Crater” and “Night Hike” that recently aired on “Discovering Alabama”. VBAS Marketplaces and Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 p.m.; they’re open to the public and are free.

Planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. We will have a show about how our ancestors used the stars for travel, farming, and family entertainment, on September 15. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$3.00 for Adults, \$2.00 for Children 6-11, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

We will hold an open observing session at 7:30 p.m. on September 29, which will focus on the Moon.

Another Street Light Shielded

On page 4, Jeff Delmas tells how he got the city to cover a light-polluting street light, and how you can do the same in your own neighborhood.

Dark Sky Status

Richard Norman updates us on his Dark Sky work on page 4.

Laptop Donated to VBAS

Doug Horacek donated a very nice Dell laptop to VBAS. See page 4 for details.

VBAS De-Energized

On page 5, Jeff Delmas tells how we dealt with the dangerous live power line that a tree knocked down while four of us were working at VBAS.

C-16 Training Class

On page 5, Richard Norman describes this month’s training session.

“Seeing In the Dark”

On page 5, Richard Norman gives a heads-up on an interesting show about amateur astronomy coming up from PBS on Wednesday, September 19.

HAAS Planetarium Show

On page 6, I talk about the planetarium show and facilities tour I put on for the Huntsville Alabama Anime Society, with a lot of help from John Young, Doug Horacek, and Jared Cassidy.

Steve Sloan
Via Stellaris Editor
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In This Issue:

VBAS Highlights for September..... 1

Calendar of Events..... 2

The Night Sky for September..... 3

Another Street Light Shielded..... 4

Dark Sky Status..... 4

Laptop Donated to VBAS..... 4

VBAS De-Energized..... 5

C-16 Training Class..... 5

PBS is Seeing in the Dark..... 5

Huntsville Alabama Anime Society Planetarium Show..... 6

Deadline for October 2007 Via Stellaris submissions is Monday, September 24.



VBAS Calendar of Events, September through October

Weekend of September 14-16, 2007

2007 Tennessee Star Party

Location: T.A.G. Primitive Baptist Youth Camp in Lynchburg, TN

See the site at www.BSASNashville.com/tnsp/ for details.

Saturday, September 15, 2007, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Old Timers and their Signposts in the Sky

Presented by Gena Crook & Brenda Rogers

Join us for a program that the whole family will enjoy as we explore how the stars and moon were used by our ancestors for travel, farming, and family entertainment! As with all of our public planetarium programs, we'll have a Star Party afterwards (weather permitting) where you'll enjoy looking at the night sky through one or more of our telescopes.

Friday, September 21, 2007, 7:00 PM

Marketplace & Regular Monthly Meeting

Marketplace is a thirty minute period before our monthly Members' Meetings on the third Friday of each month where Members gather to enjoy pizza and soft drinks while looking over any astronomy related items that other Members are offering for sale. For the members meeting, we will be showing two episodes of the Discovering Alabama television series, "Wetumpka Impact Crater" and "Night Hike". Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

Saturday, September 29, 2007, 7:30 PM

Open Observing Session, featuring the Moon

Presented by John Young

We'll have a brief tour of VBAS's facilities and an intro to the night sky. With a waning Moon, we'll focus on lunar delights and try to get a planet, nebula, galaxy and star cluster in! Members and the public are welcome to bring your own scopes.

Saturday, October 6, 2007, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Sally Ride Science Festival

Location: University of Alabama in Huntsville

Eduardo Mendoza and **John Young** will have a VBAS booth set up with static displays including telescopes, the Davis meteorite collection, and

hands-on optics. The Festival is geared towards encouraging young girls to explore science and technology and will have workshops for children and adults. Featured guest speaker will be Huntsville native and former NASA astronaut, Dr. Jan Davis. For more info see: www.sallyridefestivals.com/07uah1006/index.shtml

Friday October 12 - Saturday October 14, 2007

Fourth Annual Volunteer State Star Party *Location: Meriwether Lewis Observatory Dark Sky Site, in Tennessee*

Presented by Eric Johnson

Best Little Star Party for the money! Of course it's always free for astronomers. The Fourth annual Volunteer State Star Party is October 12th to the 14th in Lewis County, TN. Come enjoy some of the darkest skies around from this remote location on Eric's family farm. There's plenty of room for camping, hiking, and enjoying the great outdoors. Please RSVP ejohnso4@yahoo.com or call (931) 628-6467. Check the VBAS website for directions.

Friday, October 19, 2007, 7:00 PM

Marketplace & Regular Monthly Meeting

Former VBAS president and GBM principal investigator, Dr. Charles Meegan, will present an intriguing project overview on the Gamma-Ray Large Area Space Telescope (GLAST) Burst Monitor. GLAST is scheduled to launch in early 2008! Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

Saturday, October 20, 2007

Astronomy Day

The day begins with family activities in the morning, and continues throughout the afternoon and evening with movie presentations and exciting speakers from the world of space science, including nationally acclaimed author Homer Hickam. Keep watching this space for more exciting information about the big event!

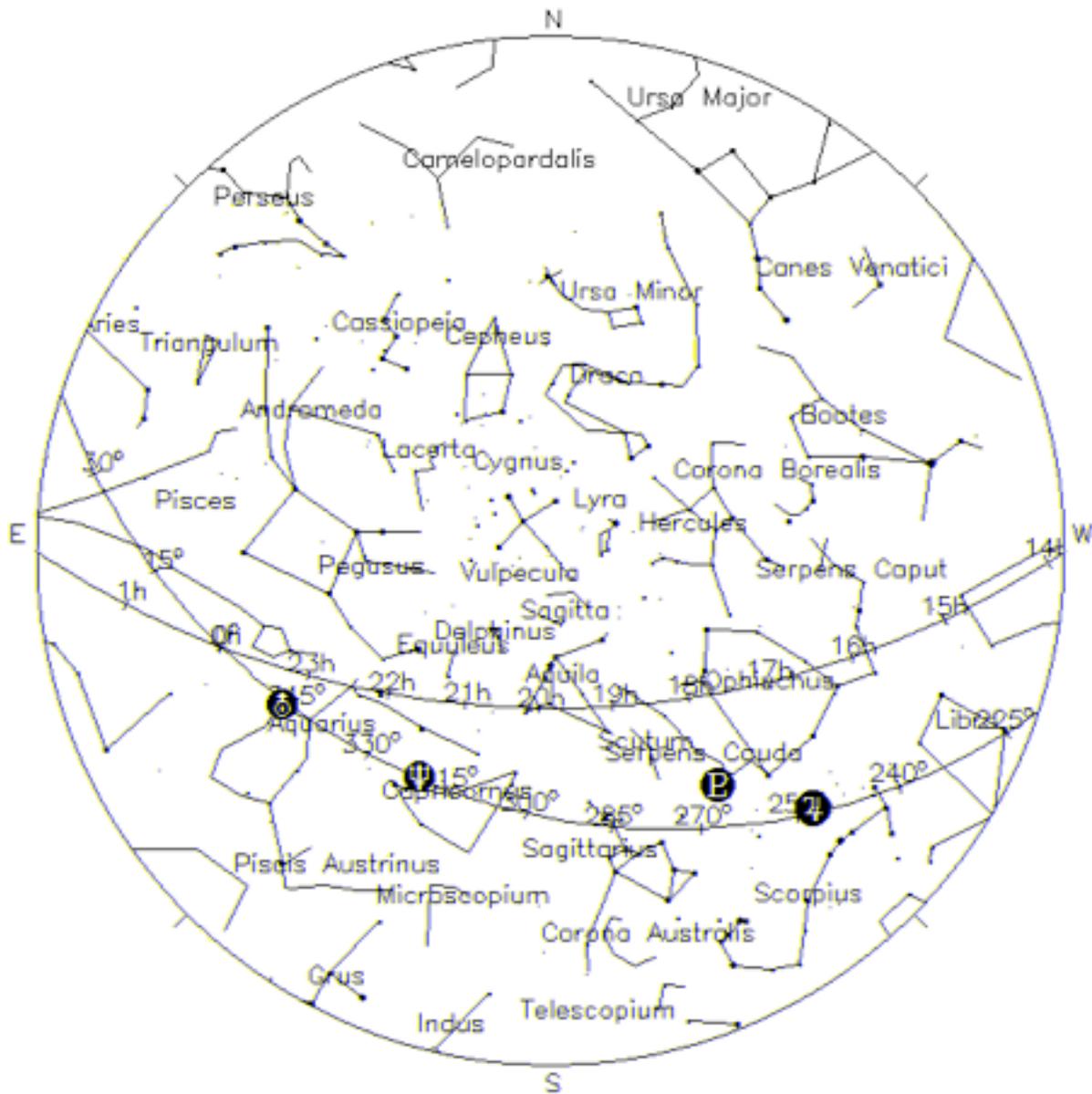
...And as always, for the most up-to-date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at vbas.org.

The Night Sky for September, 2007

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid September, 2007, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Jupiter, the symbol like the numeral 4, will be near Scorpius.

There will be a partial solar eclipse on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, peaking at 8:44 AM.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



Another Street Light Shielded

by Jeff Delmas

After reading Richard Norman's article in the July VS, *Street Light to be Shielded*, I decided to take action on my own neighborhood light pollution device. The result is that a Hubbell Skycap light shield was installed by Huntsville Utilities on the street light closest to my house in early August, and I now enjoy a much nicer view of the night skies from my deck. My deck is actually higher than the street light, so the benefit I get from the shield is considerable. I thought I would share the process I went through to get this shield installed, especially since it went so well.

The shield cost me \$50. The City of Huntsville has a program to install shields over street lights, primarily for the purpose of eliminating intrusive or obnoxious lighting

into residents' homes. Light pollution abatement is not the primary purpose of the program.

If you have a problem with a street light



glaring into your home, a partial shade may be installed. To get a street light fully shielded, as I did, you must get the agreement of your neighbors. I have two neighbors affected by the light I wanted to shield. I wrote a simple letter to Huntsville Utilities and got my neighbors to sign it. That letter, a phone call, and my \$50, was about all it took. Within two weeks, the shade was installed.

Here are the steps:

1. Call Jamie Patterson at Huntsville Utilities (535-1370). Describe where you live and the street light that's bothering you and he can look it up on a map.
2. He can either send you a form to fill out to get your neighbor's approval, or you can write a letter yourself and obtain your neighbor's approval that way.
3. Send in the form or letter, along with a check for \$50.

As I mentioned, the process was easy and the fixture was installed less than two weeks from my phone call to Jamie. I'm quite happy with the results!

Dark Sky Status

by Richard Norman

MSFC Center Director, Mr. David King provided a generally positive response and a commitment to proper lighting and illumination of Marshall's outdoor areas.

The American Meteorological Society chapter gave John and me an opportunity to speak to their membership about VBAS and the Dark Sky Park project.

Melissa and I will be speaking to a group at the Huntsville Library on Wed. Gena and I are arranging a meeting with the Monte Sano Women's club.

Doug, John, and I will be speaking with the North Alabama Sierra Club board this month. Ken and I are working with Boy Scouts of America. If you'd like to get involved, we can use more help in spreading the word.

Laptop Donated to VBAS

by John Young

VBAS member Doug Horacek recently donated a nice, used Dell system to VBAS. The system is comprised of a laptop, docking station, flat-panel monitor, mouse, keyboard, speakers, and printer. As always Doug, thanks for your generous support of resources, participation, and time with VBAS!



Doug shows off the nice machine he donated.

VBAS De-Energized (For Most of a Day)

by Jeff Delmas



Jeff (left) and John examine the culprit tree. Note the small plume of smoke where the power line landed on a tree branch.

I went up to the observatory about 10 am Saturday, August 25th to work on fastening the RA optical encoder mount (constructed by Walt Langley) to the 21" Swanson. I worked on it a little, and I was talking with Steve Sloan while preparing to drill some holes, when all of a sudden... CRASH--POP... and the power goes out. There were four of us up there: I, Steve, John Young, and Jared Cassidy. Everyone walked outside to make sure everyone else was OK. Thankfully, all were fine. We then walked down the drive to find a dead tree that had fallen across the road and snapped the power and phone lines. It was about 11:30 am when the power went out.

The energized line was laying across a tree and down onto the pavement. The street was wet, which allowed the line to arc to ground. The line sizzled like bacon on a hot

griddle. Worse, the branch that the line laid across started smoking and sparking. John contacted Kent Wilburn, the park ranger, immediately. Kent reported no further power outage and then called the power company.

Meanwhile the live wire had burned its way through the first branch and was now lying across a lower branch, which also started smoking and even flamed up for a bit. Lucky us, after three weeks of drought, we just had nearly two inches of rain the night before and everything was still quite wet - so there was little danger of starting a serious forest fire. The line finally burned its way completely through the branches, and as it fell it touched the other broken line, the return line, and we heard another loud POP. This time it shorted out the system further back up the road and, this time, about half of the park campground lost power. It didn't take long for Kent to drive back down to see what had happened. The power company was contacted once again to let them know the situation had worsened.

Once the second short occurred and knocked out a wider swath, our downed lines were now de-energized and posed nearly no threat (I still wouldn't trust the things to not suddenly get re-energized). Since the lines were already down, John and I decided to take the opportunity to cut down another dead tree that might one day fall and cause a similar calamity. We finished that about 4 p.m. and the power company had still not arrived. We were tired and decided to drive out and leave contact information with Kent.

Later Saturday evening, John heard from Kent that the power was restored.

C-16 Training Class

by Richard Norman

Although it started off Cloudy, Saturday night turned out to be a good night for learning to operate the C16. The sky between clouds had good transparency and seeing.

Although we had a small class, the students were eager to operate the scope. The sky commander worked well. It is especially handy in cloudy conditions. If you missed the class, don't fret training is available upon request.

PBS is Seeing in the Dark

Professor Timothy Ferris has a featured prime-time special called "Seeing in the Dark", which will air on PBS in HDTV on Wed Sept 19th (check local listing for time).

The 60 minute show is about getting folks interested in amateur astronomy. There is no mention of light pollution in the show description.

There are two companion web sites: www.seeinginthedark.org, which is available now, and pbs.org/seeinginthedark, which will open on Sept 5.

Huntsville Alabama Anime Society Planetarium Show

by Steve Sloan.



HAAS Members Alex, Barry (L-R, inner ring), Basil, Sooz, Lee (L-R, middle ring), James and Jess (L-R, outer ring) watch anime.

On Friday, August 31, I hosted a planetarium show and anime viewing at the VBAS facilities for HAAS, the Huntsville Alabama Anime Society. For those who don't know, anime is Japanese animation, typically aimed at adults. Typical HAAS member ages range from late teens to late twenties. HAAS holds monthly Extra events, where they do various activities around town, including bowling. A few months ago, they were looking for suggestions for things to do. I suggested I arrange a planetarium show at VBAS for them, and everyone I heard from at HAAS was really excited about the idea. Scheduling conflicts kept it from happening for a few months, but the timing finally worked out this month.

On the day of the show, I was surprised (and more than a little panicked!) to find out that the event had been advertised in the paper, since it was primarily intended to be for HAAS and VBAS members. I worried that we might get the same sort of overwhelming crowds that the regular planetarium shows have been getting lately, but fortunately, we only had four additional people that I didn't know.

To kick off the evening, I presented a planetarium show I had prepared about Japanese star stories. Here's a brief summary. I spoke a little about Chinese astrology, which was adopted by Japan. The Japanese and modern Western names for Ursa Major and Ursa Minor happen to sound very similar, with somewhat similar meanings. I told a love story about Orihime (Vega) and Kengyu (Altair) separated by the river of the Milky Way. I spoke about the

many things the Japanese saw in the Pleiades, which they call Subaru. The Japanese saw many different and interesting things in Orion, including a drum, a kimono sleeve, and a legendary historic battle between two families, whose family colors were red (Betelgeuse) and white (Rigel).

After I completed the planetarium show, we watched anime shows on the two dome projectors. All shows were required to have a strong theme of going into space. The first anime we showed was an episode of *Planetes*, which is an animated hard science fiction TV series about future astronauts clearing space junk in orbit.

After that, we took a break to look through the C16. Unfortunately, the clouds moved in and covered the sky before anyone could get more than a glimpse of Jupiter. However, it gave John Young, Doug Horacek, and Jared Cassidy a chance to talk about and show off the C16 and the roll-off roof.



John, Doug, and Jared (L-R) show off the C16.



Lee, Basil, Jess, James, and Mary (L-R, foreground) watch as John and Doug (L-R, background) demonstrate the C16.



Doug demonstrates the CI6 cover to (L-R) Brent, Lira, James, Lee, Basil, and Jess.

After we got through there, I took them up to the Angele dome to look around.



Ura peeks up the stairs, while Mary, Alex, and Barry (L-R) look at the 21”.



(L-R) Alex, Jess, Lira, James, and Barry in the Angele dome.

I was generally too busy running around to see most of the anime they showed after that. I was able to watch some of one I brought, “Voices of a Distant Star”, about two lovers trying to communicate despite interstellar distances and relativistic time dilation.

During breaks, many HAAS members enjoyed drawing on the spherical chalkboard. I took a few pictures for posterity.



Jennifer examines the spherical chalkboard.



Alex draws on the spherical chalkboard.

As we were wrapping up for the night, Sooz asked me when the next official planetarium show will be. She was disappointed that she missed “Things That Go Boom” two weeks before. I’m sure she’ll be attending at least one of our regular planetarium shows in the future, and I believe we got real interest from other HAAS members.

Acknowledgments: I’d especially like to thank John Young, who was the only one who offered ideas, encouragement, and help when I first suggested this event a few months ago. He also made sure the telescope camera was wired into one of the projectors before the event happened, opened the facilities on Friday night, and ran the CI6. Thanks to Roy Young, who blessed the idea the second time I suggested it, and offered useful suggestions. Doug Horacek and Jared Cassidy helped John Friday night. Thanks to everybody who helped. You made it a very successful night.

Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Steve Sloan at editor1@vbas.org. If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Vilaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

Membership and Renewal

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership, and the dues for each, are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships have been renewed until March 2008. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Dennis Culver.

Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society. If your mailing or email address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary, Dennis Culver, at 489-3649, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor