



VBAS Highlights for June

Public Programs for June

Our next member's meeting will be held on Friday, June 20th at 7 p.m. We'll have a potluck dinner, then longtime VBAS member Andrew Wilson will speak about radio astronomy. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 p.m.; they're open to the public and are free.

Regular planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. This month, we continue a yearlong series on the planets and other bodies of our Solar System with three family-friendly shows on Jupiter, on June 7th, 14th, and 28th. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, "5.00 for Adults, "3.00 for Students, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

Potluck Dinner

At our next VBAS Member Meeting, on Friday, June 20th, we will have a potluck dinner before longtime VBAS member Andy Wilson speaks about radio astronomy. Please bring food that you'd like to share.

Goodbye, Dr. Stuhlinger

VBAS founding member Dr. Ernst Stuhlinger passed away on the morning of Sunday, May 25. He was part of von Braun's German rocket team. He immigrated to the US during Operation Paperclip, and became a US citizen in 1955. He was director of the Marshall space sciences lab 1960-1968, Marshall's associate director for science 1968-1975, then an adjunct professor and senior research scientist at UAH. He was awarded the Electric Rocket Propulsion Society's medal for outstanding achievement. He brought science to the public by helping Wernher von Braun found the Rocket City Astronomical Society, and was an active leader until long after the RCAA became known as VBAS.

Mars and the Beehive Cluster

On page 3, Doug Horacek gives us a report of his recent observations.

VBAS 2008 Annual Meeting Minutes

Pages 4 through 6 have the minutes of May's Annual Meeting, along with photos of the event.

April Member Meeting Highlights

Our April meeting featured a panel of VBAS early and founding members. Highlights and photos are on page 7.

Messier Marathon

See page 8 for details on our latest, highly successful Messier Marathon.

Steve Sloan
Via Stellaris Editor
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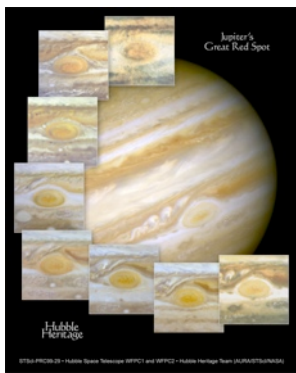
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VBAS Calendar of Events

Saturday, June 7th, 14th, & 28th, 2008

Planetarium Show:

With its intriguing red spots and supersonic winds, our solar system's largest planet has long captured the fascination and eyes of mankind. With a mass equivalent to twice that of all the other planets combined, and high atmospheric concentrations of hydrogen and helium, it has become known as the Gas Giant. Listen as our presenters highlight its formation, historical significance, exploration e\$orts, and large system of moons.



Hubble Tracks Jupiter's Great Red Spot. (Image credit: Amy Simon et al. & the Hubble Heritage Team)

Friday, June 20th, 2008, 7 PM

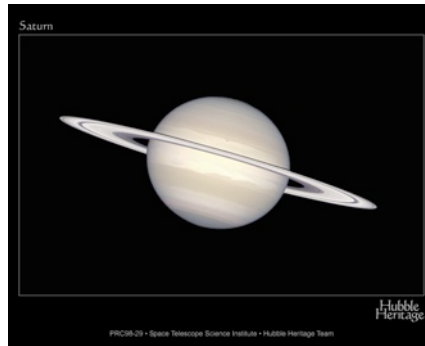
Regular Monthly Meeting

After a potluck dinner social and marketplace swap meet, we'll discuss pertinent society business. The speaker for the evening will be long!time VBAS member Andrew Wilson, who holds degrees in both physics and mathematics... a near perfect fit for astronomy. Combine that with a passion for amateur radio and you get a lecture on radio astronomy. He'll touch on the basics of electromagnetics, atmospheric, and current ground!based e\$orts... all with a lean towards hands!on applications for the amateur. Visitors are welcome.

Saturday, July 5th, 12th, & 26th, 2008

Planetarium Show:

Join us for a family!friendly program to explore the planet Saturn in the VBAS Planetarium as part of our year!long exploration of our Solar System! Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one or more of VBAS's powerful telescopes.



Natural Saturn. On The Cassini Cruise (Image credit: Hubble Heritage Team. (AURA/ STScI/ NASA)

Friday, July 18th, 2008, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business. The program has not been announced as of yet. Visitors are welcome.

Saturday, July 19th, 2008, 7 PM

Planetarium Show

Presented by

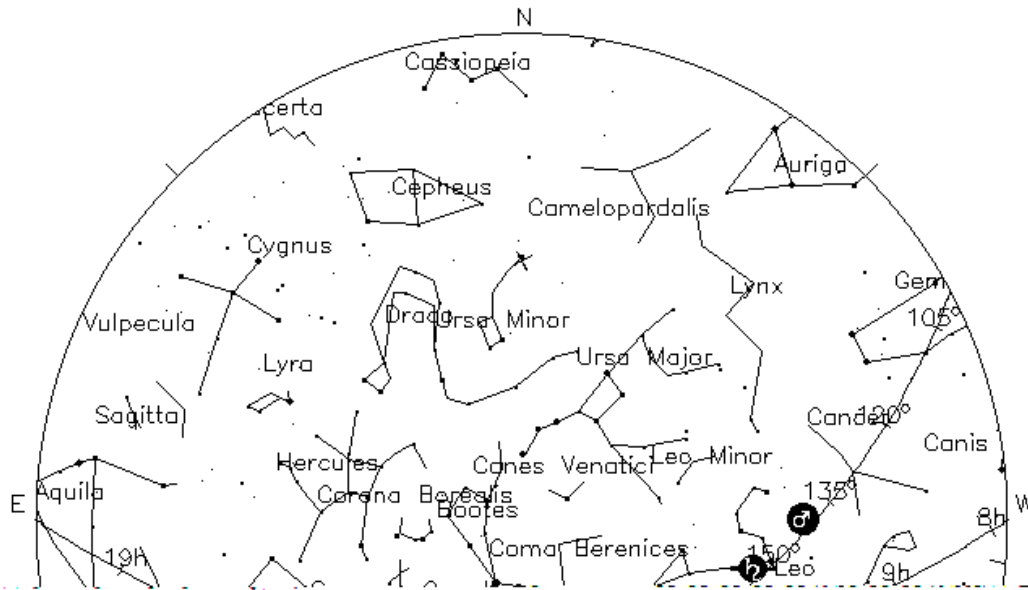
The topic and speaker for the 1st Saturday of each month is geared a little more to the technical side of astronomy and related sciences.

...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 June, 2008

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid June, 2008, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Mars (the spear and shield symbol) and Jupiter (the "h" like symbol) will be in the western sky near Leo.

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



Mars and the Beehive Cluster

by Doug Horacek

Here are the results of my observations Wednesday 23 May 2008.

I observed Mars from twilight until 10:00 P.M. Wednesday evening. Mars approached the outer field of stars in the beehive cluster in Cancer. I observed Mars moving a little less than 3 minutes of arc toward the cluster. Mars and four stars in the outer part of the cluster were visible together. There was a line of three stars; the two dimmer

stars in the line on the left, and a dim star below made a triangle. Mars moved away from the bright star on the right, and more toward the triangle of stars to the left. From the Sky and Telescope chart and my millennium, atlas this agreed with the path predicted.

' Also that evening while I was watching, a bright meteor appeared in the northwest.

' I also observed a bright object above Mars, brighter and broader than Mars, just before nine that evening CDT.

2008 Annual Meeting Minutes

VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM

Friday, May 16, 2008

by John Young

There was a quorum of officers present: Jeff Delmas, John Young, Sara Neale, Melissa Snider, VBAS historian Richard Norman and librarian Doshia Wilson were in attendance as well. The following candidates for the 2008 elections were also present: David Lofts, Ethan Chew, and Jeff Delmas.

There was a quorum of members present.

VBAS president-elect John Young called the meeting to order at 19:40.

John welcomed members and visitors and asked that visitors introduce themselves.

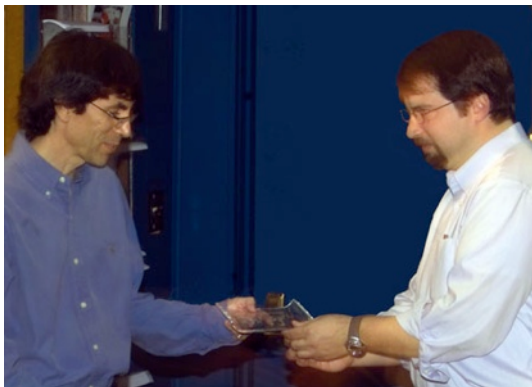
Annual Elections

Annual elections were held. John summarized the process and introduced the candidates in attendance, and those that could not attend. Being that the ballots received by mail contained no written candidates, a motion for a simple voice vote was called for to approve the ballot. The motion was seconded. All votes cast as ayes by the members in attendance.

VBAS treasurer Sara Neale presented a summary of the 2008-2009 budget that was drafted by the budget committee and approved by the board. A motion was made to approve the budget. The motion was seconded. All votes cast as ayes by the members in attendance.

Awards and Certificates

John presented Jeff Delmas and Melissa Snider with service awards.



John Young gives Jeff Delmas (left) a service award.



John gives Melissa Snider (left) a service award.

John also had a service award to recognize Eduardo Mendoza for two years of dedicated service to the society as student director. However, Eduardo was not in attendance.

Jeff presented Doug Horacek with a dedicated volunteer award.



Jeff Delmas gives Doug Horacek (right) a volunteer award.

Jeff presented Gerry Simpson with an honorary lifetime membership certificate and card.



Jeff Delmas gives Gerry Simpson (right) a lifetime membership.

Gena Crook presented Richard Norman with a Night Sky Network pin recognizing his dedicated service to VBAS' educational outreach programs. James Brelsford was also recognized with a pin, however he was not in attendance.



Gena Crook gives Richard Norman (left) a Night Sky Network pin.

Jeff presented John with his Astronomical League Messier certificate and pin for observing and logging all 110 objects in the Messier catalog.



Jeff (left) presents John with a Messier Certificate.

Je\$ presented a summary of the facilities addition project, including fundraising efforts.

New Business Items

At 20:05, John put out a call for new business items.

Tom Burleson Jr. asked that consideration be given to having the next Messier Marathon at a location other than VBAS. His primary concern was the difficulty in observing a number of the Messier objects due to the large trees surrounding the observing field, and the growing sky glow from the surrounding area. Je\$ Delmas commented that

taking down some of the taller trees may help, and has been considered recently. He also mentioned the usefulness and purpose of keeping the event at VBAS, since it is the key observing event that draws people to our facilities. Je\$ reminded the group that there is Eric Johnson's star party every fall at a dark site in Tennessee. Moderate discussion continued on this topic by Je\$, Doug Horacek, and Ethan Chew, including possible alternate locations for either the Messier Marathon or another star party.

Tom Burleson Jr. stated that the Barnard Seyfert Astronomical Society may not have their annual star party this year.

Sam Tumminello asked about whether we have the ability to project telescope images into the planetarium. John reported that this capability is currently limited and has not been fully tested. There was a VGA cable put in from the C16 area to the planetarium console within the last year and it was partially used in conjunction with the HAAS member meeting that was hosted by VBAS within the last several months. Richard Norman mentioned that an attempt was also made using a video cable for the stellacam. Since we had to splice two video cables together, we ran into some connector issues, but it proved the concept was feasible. A single cable with good connectors needs to be pulled and routed via conduit from the planetarium to the C16. The stellacam also needs a focal reducer to work well on deep sky objects for the C16, and the operator will need a good quality monitor to adjust focus.

Doug Horacek asked whether we had a video camera for the 21" telescope in the Swanson Observatory. John provided a summary answer on the current status of that effort, and reminded the group that it takes resources to make things happen, especially people.

At 20:20, John handed the floor over to the guest speaker for the evening, local physicist Je\$ Cameron. Je\$ presented the group with the basic principles behind electrostatic lift propulsion. His presentation included a live demonstration of the concept, which included lifting a simple vehicle nearly a foot above a tabletop surface. At the conclusion of his presentation and the ensuing Q&A,

John mentioned possibly having Je\$ up for our fall Astronomy Day.

After the presentation a final call was made for any remaining questions or business items. Since there were none, the meeting was adjourned, and group pictures were taken.



Megan Beattie (left) receives the Ann Sanford Memorial Telescope from Gena Crook.



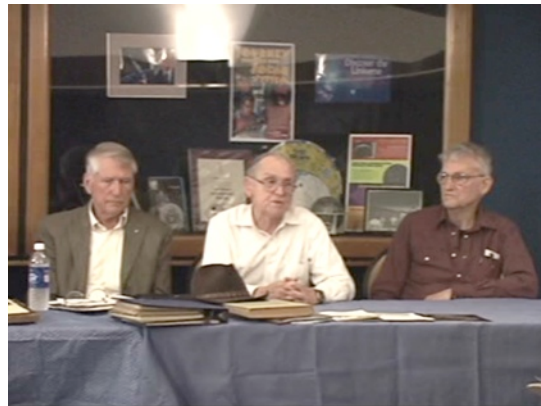
Highlights from the April Members' Meeting

by John Young

Attending members and visitors of VBAS' April 18th meeting were treated to a gathering of some of our founding and early members. Our society has a rich history founded and sustained by ingenuity, dedication, and some good ole fashioned elbow grease. It's not often that we younger members get a chance to hear the stories and interact with those that paved the way. In attendance that evening

were Ted Paludan, Jim Daniels, Gert Schmitz, Dave Christensen, Skeet Vaughan, and Otis Henderson. It was both an honor and a pleasure, gentlemen.

Je\$ Delmas recorded the evening, and a friend of his produced a DVD video. Please contact Je\$ at [je\\$@delmasfamily.net](mailto:je$@delmasfamily.net) if you would like a copy.



Messier Marathon Biggest in Years

by Jeff Delmas

This year's Messier Marathon brought out more members and guests than we've seen in many years. A total of 16 telescopes were set up by members for the evening's observing activities.



Members Setting Up for the Messier Marathon.

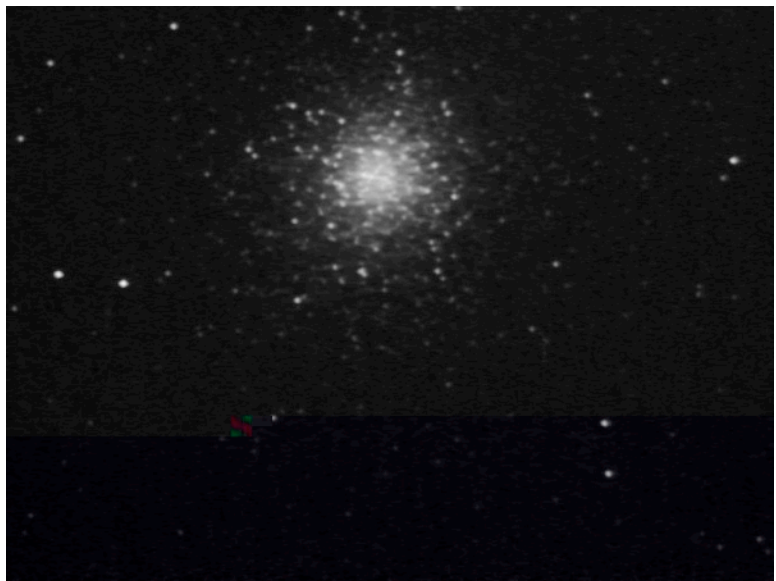
Due to weather, we postponed the event from Friday, May 2nd to Saturday, May 3rd. Holding the event on Saturday allowed visitors to the planetarium an opportunity to view several different objects through a variety of telescopes. Between members, friends, and visitors, perhaps a hundred people were out that evening for a chance to view some of the night sky wonders.

One of the evening's highlights was viewing Saturn through the Society's 6" diameter StarFire refractor at high magnification. The clarity was stunning, and reminded everyone that we should bring out this telescope more often.

A Messier Marathon is an event where participants attempt to log as many objects in the Messier catalog as they possibly can. Viewing conditions were not quite ideal, with limiting magnitude at 4 to 4.5, and as Tom Burleson, Jr. pointed out, it's difficult to actually observe all objects in the Messier catalog at the VBAS observing field, due to the trees blocking the eastern and southern views, and the light pollution from the city. However, it's still a convenient and enjoyable location from which to observe, and the site affords many the opportunity that may be missed by the inaccessibility of a more remote site. We may try to hold the

marathon or an additional observing event at an alternate site within an hour of Huntsville in the future.

By 4:00 am, Jupiter was high enough to view, and we were just in time to observe Io disappear behind the great planet. I logged 18 Messier objects, and took a few photos through a Meade DSI camera, including the image of M13 below.



Treasurer's Reports

by Sara Neale

Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc. Profit & Loss

April 1 through May 14, 2008

	<u>Apr 1 - May 14, 08</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
donation/Building Fund	235.00
Gift Shop Sales	32.00
Magazine Income	201.90
Membership Dues	1,232.00
Program Fees	858.00
Total Income	<u>2,558.90</u>
Gross Profit	<u>2,558.90</u>
Expense	
Awards	30.29
fundraising	9.45
GRANT expenditure	126.36
Magazine Expense	34.00
Printing	40.38
Show Presenters	420.00
Supplies	37.51
Telephone	136.37
Website	45.95
Total Expense	<u>880.31</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>1,678.59</u>
Net Income	<u><u>1,678.59</u></u>

Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc. Profit & Loss

July 1, 2007 through May 14, 2008

	<u>Jul 1, '07 - May 14, 08</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
Astro Day Raffle	125.00
donation	156.00
donation/aquarium	21.42
donation/Building Fund	1,160.00
donation/Dark Sky	50.00
Food sales	387.06
Gift Shop Sales	326.00
Magazine Income	501.60
Membership Dues	2,348.95
Program Fees	5,438.95
Total Income	<u>10,514.98</u>
Gross Profit	<u>10,514.98</u>
Expense	
Astro Day Food	275.71
Astro League Dues	730.00
Awards	30.29
Food expense	137.06
fundraising	9.45
Gift Shop Purchase	92.85
GRANT expenditure	178.46
HATS dues	50.00
Liability Insurance	250.00
Magazine Expense	753.50
Network Solutions	100.00
Newsletter	164.30
P.O. Box	68.00
Printing	40.38
Professional Fees	161.99
Show Presenters	680.00
Supplies	321.48
Telephone	448.80
VISA credit	45.95
Website	294.12
Total Expense	<u>4,832.34</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>5,682.64</u>
Net Income	<u><u>5,682.64</u></u>

Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc. Balance Sheet

As of May 14, 2008

	<u>May 14, 08</u>
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
Compass Bank	67,015.39
Total Checking/Savings	<u>67,015.39</u>
Other Current Assets	
Certificate of Deposit	5,000.00
Inventory Asset	340.27
Total Other Current Assets	<u>5,340.27</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>72,355.66</u>
Fixed Assets	
Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipm	4,161.95
Total Fixed Assets	<u>4,161.95</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u><u>76,517.61</u></u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Equity	
Fund Balance	57,457.71
Opening Bal Equity	13,377.26
Net Income	5,682.64
Total Equity	<u>76,517.61</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u><u>76,517.61</u></u>

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 came up for renewal on March 1, 2008. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Gerry Conrad.

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, Gerry Conrad, at conrad1908@knology.net or 722-8212, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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VIA STELLARIS



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Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor