



The Monthly Newsletter of the Von Braun Astronomical Society

VBAS Highlights for July

Public Programs for July

Our next member's meeting will be held on Friday, July 17th at 7 PM. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 PM; they're open to the public and are free.

Regular planetarium programs are held on Saturdays at 7:30 PM. This month, we discuss *Black Holes* with shows on July 4th, 11th, and 25th. On the 18th, we will give a seasonal sky tour. 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.

President's Message

As Michael Cowger begins a new term as VBAS President this month, he describes his plans for the society on page 2.

The Student's Corner

On page 7, Student Director David Lofts writes about *Going Back to the Moon*.

VBAS's 2009 Professional of the Year

On page 7, Michael Cowger reports on James Brelsford's win as VBAS Professional of the Year at the Huntsville Association of Technical Societies dinner.

VBAS Board Meeting Minutes

The May board meeting minutes start on page 8.

Stellar Events for July

Doug Horacek reports on this month's astronomical events on page 9.

Steve Sloan

Via Stellaris Editor

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President's Message

by *Michael Cowger*



After enjoying the past fourteen years as a member and serving from time to time in various positions on our Board of Directors, including my most recent positions as President and then Past President, it is once again my honor to have been elected to serve you again as VBAS's President for the 2009-2010 term of office.

Over the past four years, I've focused my efforts on helping other members to do what they do best and build stronger foundations for many of our ongoing efforts to bring astronomy to the public while providing our members additional opportunities and resources to increase their knowledge and share their excitement of astronomy with others.

By late 2006, after getting actively involved again as Vice-President and talking with the general public at various sidewalk astronomy events that we started hosting with our 14 inch Meade LX-200 in the Huntsville-Madison area, I realized, and several members agreed by late 2007, that we needed to provide more educational opportunities for both our members and the public.

In January 2007, with the help of several members, we launched having a planetarium

program every Saturday night, with a star party afterwards when weather permitted.

Thanks to several dedicated members, our Saturday night programs have been very successful over the past eighteen months, in addition to several other planetarium programs, star parties, and sidewalk astronomy events that are held at various times during the week throughout the year, including our most recent monthly observing programs for youth and adults that David Lofts and Doug Horacek have been coordinating over the past six months.

Now that we've proven a need for these types of programs for our members and within our community, as well as our ability to support such efforts, the Board of Directors is exploring ways that we can improve our presentations by replacing our current star projector, and kick-starting construction of our stalled addition to our facilities.

Thanks to the efforts already underway by our recently appointed Membership Secretary, Jared Cassidy, and newly elected Director of Administration, Neil Boyd, we've already begun to streamline our membership application process in order to resolve some recent issues, and we hope to complete a Members' Handbook this Fall.

Many of you have either joined or renewed your membership at one of our public programs, and no doubt noticed that it was a hectic time for those helping to support that night's program, who themselves may be fairly new members and/or lack the time to really help new members to get involved in an area of their interest.

At our most recent Board of Director's meeting, we decided to no longer accept membership applications at our programs because we would really like for members, especially new members, to come to our next Members' Meeting, which is always held on the third Friday of each month except for December, so that we can get to know what level and area(s) of interest they have in astronomy, in order

that we can help get them involved with one or more of our ongoing programs.

Of course, members can always join and renew their membership via our website by printing out the application form on the "Join VBAS" page, and mailing it along with their check to the address provided. And soon, we hope to include online payments through our website.

But rather than just accepting membership applications and money at programs or via the mail, the main goal of the above is to really help our members get the most out of their membership by first attending a Members' Meeting to get involved in the society, while also taking that burden off of our program supporters.

The Board also recently agreed that the prorating system for new members was another area that needed to be simplified, and decided that all new members should pay the annual rate for their type of membership when they join.

Our Membership Secretary will determine each member's next March due date based on when they joined. If they join March through August, then their membership will be due again in March of the following year. But if they join September through February, then their membership will be due again in March of the year after next.

Thanks to the dedication of several members over the past couple of years, including Jeff Delmas, Domenico "Mimmo" Demartino, and Wesley Swift, VBAS's Director of Observatories, the effort to re-furbish our 21 inch telescope so that it can be programmatically controlled from a room on the first floor of the Swanson Observatory is only a couple of months away from completion.

As President over the next twelve months, I'll continue to seek ways, as I have in the past, to improve our existing programs for both members and the public while broadening our resources and community support.

In addition to modernizing our planetarium equipment and re-commissioning our 21 inch telescope for research purposes over the next six months, I hope to have the first of three construction phases completed for our long-awaited addition to our facilities by next Spring, with the help of our newly elected Director of Facilities, Don Martin, newly elected Vice-President, Al Reisz, and several other members who will be helping on our newly-formed building committee. The facilities improvements will include much-needed roof repairs for the Angele Observatory building.

Our common interest in astronomy is what binds us together as a society even though we all joined for various reasons, with many different levels, as well as areas of interest and/or expertise, in astronomy.

As President, my priority and perhaps biggest challenge is to encourage each of you to get involved, if you are not already, to see how much fun you're missing out on and to solicit your suggestions on how we might be able to improve YOUR society!

By getting involved, you'll enjoy meeting several like-minded individuals who will either help you to enjoy astronomy that much more or vice-versa.

Whether I'm just enjoying the night sky at one of our star parties, talking with a fellow member about their interest in astronomy, or helping to support a program, I always learn something new and often make new friendships.

I hope that you'll join us too at one of the many upcoming events as listed here in our newsletter and on our website!

Sincerely,

Michael Cowger

President

Von Braun Astronomical Society

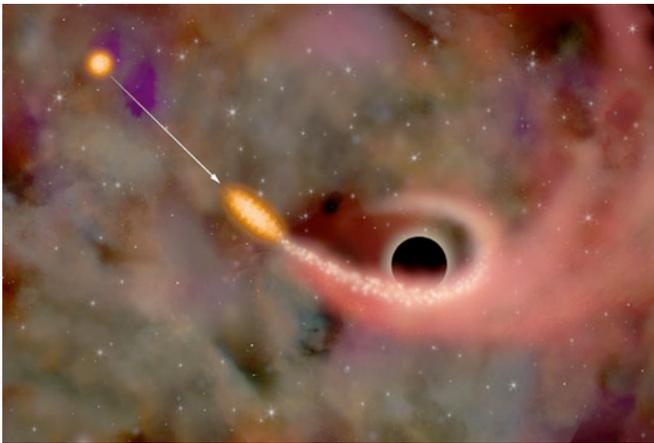
VBAS Calendar of Events

Saturday, July 4th, 11th, & 25th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: **Black Holes**

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family-friendly program as we explore black holes. We will discover some of the characteristics of these stealthy celestial objects, how they were discovered, and where they are located in the night sky. BUT do not expect to see one. They are black, you know. Bring the whole family. This program will be interesting and fun for all ages. Weather permitting, we will be viewing the night sky afterwards through powerful telescopes, too.



*X-Rays Indicate Star Ripped Up by Black Hole
(Illustration Credit: M. Weiss, [CXC](#), [NASA](#))*

Thursday, July 16th, 2009, 8 PM

(Rain date Thursday, July 23, 2009)

Celestial Scavenger Hunt

Location: Huntsville Botanical Gardens

Do not miss this chance to see the Garden at night! The Garden is going to stay open late for anyone who would like to attend a guided walk at dusk by one of our docents at 8 p.m. This walk is going to be geared toward youngsters, so bring them along. Afterward, enjoy an ice cream sundae at the Children's Garden around 8:30. When it gets dark, the star gazing begins. Members from the Von Braun Astronomical Society will be on hand to assist participants in completing a Celestial Scavenger Hunt. Participants will rotate through the nature

center classroom for a short presentation on the night sky. Afterward, complete the Celestial Scavenger Hunt by using star charts and viewing points in the sky through various telescopes. Do not miss this special evening of star gazing! Paid admission or Garden membership gets you into this special night! For further information, please call Special Events at 430-3572 ext. 241 or events@hsvbg.org. In the event of rain or heavy cloud cover the event will move to July 23.

Friday, July 17th, 2009, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program. Stay tuned to the website for the latest program information.

Saturday, July 18th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: **Seasonal Star Tour**

Location: VBAS

Join us for a relaxing evening at VBAS. We'll show you which constellations are visible this time of year, and teach you how to find them. We'll also learn about the fascinating and beautiful deep sky objects that can be found, along with a mix of mythology. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes, too.

Friday, July 24th, 2009, 7:30 PM - 10 PM

Youth and Adult Observing Night

Location: VBAS

Presented by David Lofts and Doug Horacek

Beginning at 7:30, there will be a planetarium presentation by David Lofts and Doug Horacek, followed by observing time. Adults can arrive before 7:30 to set up their scopes if needed. Call David Lofts at 726-0275 or Doug Horacek at 772-6788 for more information.

Friday, August 14th, 2009

Youth and Adult Observing Night

Location: **VBAS**

Presented by **David Lofts and Doug Horacek**

Friday, August 21st, 2009, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: **VBAS**

Friday, October 9th - Sunday, October 11th, 2009

Greenbank Radio Telescope Trip

Location: **West Virginia**

You're invited on a trip with Michael Cowger to see the world's largest movable radio telescope and to tour the National Radio Astronomy Observatory's Greenbank Facilities, which include several radio telescopes, in the mountains of West Virginia during the Fall colors! The group, including family members, will travel by bus on Friday, October 9th to a Star Party at nearby Snowshoe Resort's Rimfire Lodge, then tour the Greenbank facilities on Saturday, followed by dinner and a ride on the Cass Scenic Railroad, then another Star Party before returning on Sunday.



Contact Michael Cowger for additional details at mcowger@bellsouth.net, and visit the related links below:

Observatory: www.gb.nrao.edu

Lodging: www.rimfirelodge.com

Dinner/Train: www.cassrailroad.com

Friday October 16 - Saturday October 17, 2009

Sixth Annual Volunteer State Star Party

Location: **Meriwether Lewis Observatory Dark Sky Site, Summertown, Tennessee**

Presented by **Eric Johnson**

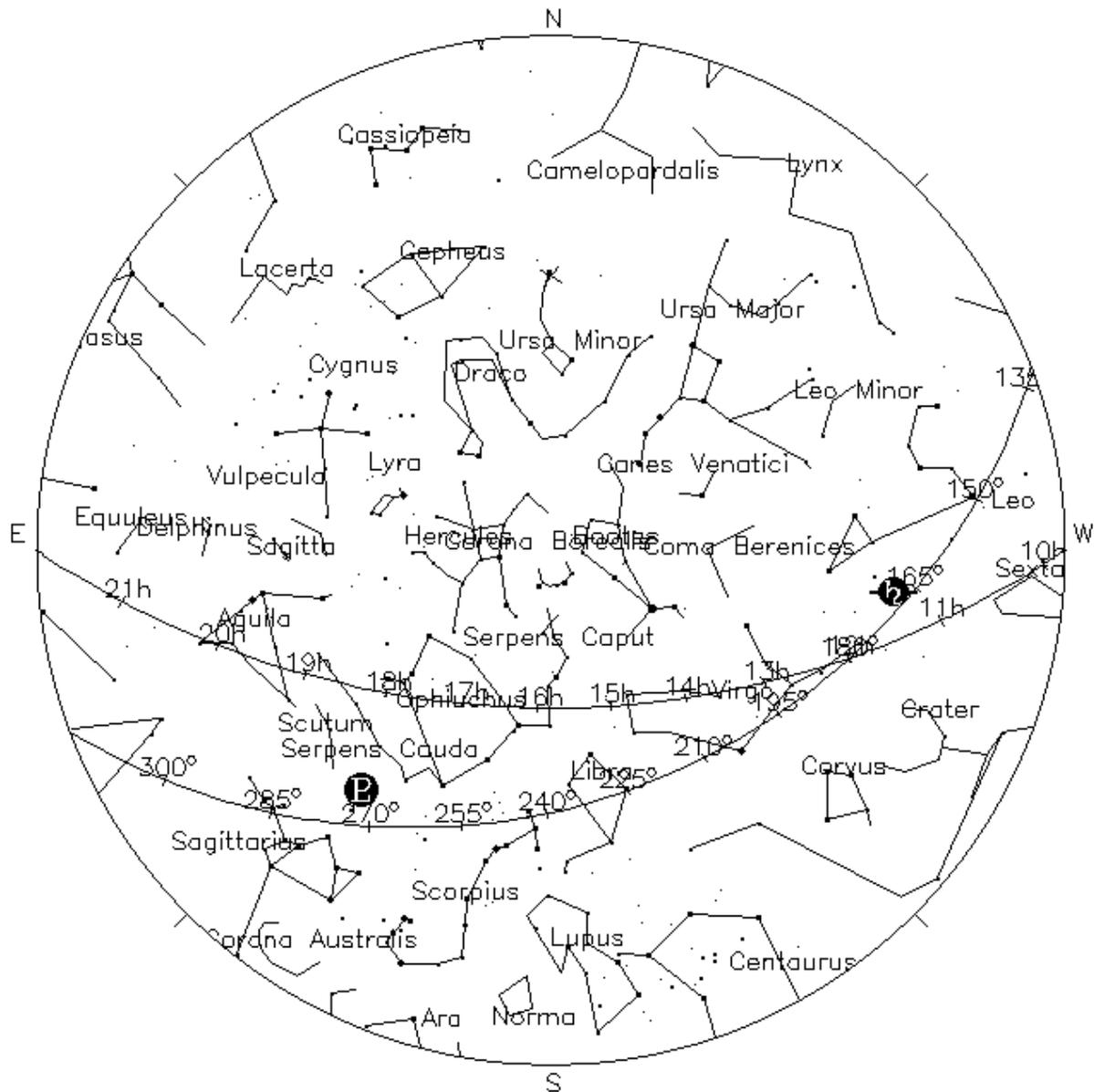
VBAS member Eric Johnson is opening up his dark sky site in Southern Tennessee for a weekend of observing, good food, and plenty of hospitality. The site is in Lewis County, Tennessee, between Hohenwald and Summertown. This is a very dark sky site. Primitive camping and facilities are on site. It is free to all astronomers near and far. Don't forget your scope. RSVP Eric Johnson at ejohnso4@yahoo.com.

...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 July, 2009

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid July, 2009, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Saturn (the lowercase “h” symbol) will be in the western sky, between Leo and Virgo.

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



The Student's Corner: Going Back to the Moon

by David Lofts

Many of your parents remember the Apollo missions to the moon from when they were kids. Toward the end of the Apollo missions, NASA announced its plans to create the space shuttle program. Ever since, we humans have not made a single trip back to the moon in over 40 years. Instead, we focused our efforts in making the Mir Space Station and in more recent times the International Space Station, but this is about to change.

In 2006, NASA announced their plans to create the Ares I and the Ares V rockets to take us back to the moon once again. The launching will be accomplished in three stages. The first will take the astronauts up into earth orbit in the Ares I. The second will then take the fuel, provisions, and equipment in the Ares V. Then the Ares I and V rockets will make a rendezvous in space and arrange parts accordingly. After the rendezvous, the rockets will carry the astronauts to the moon.



Ares V (on the left) and Ares I

VBAS's 2009 Professional Of The Year

by Michael Cowger



Several members enjoyed attending the HATS (Huntsville Association Of Technical Societies) annual POY (Professional Of The Year) Dinner recently to honor James Brelsford as VBAS's Professional Of The Year! James was recognized for his efforts to help coordinate our planetarium programs' schedules, topics, and fellow member support. We also had the pleasure to dine with and thank fellow VBAS members Elissa Owens and Domenico 'Mimmo' Demartino for their recent efforts to

support our planetarium programs and Swanson Observatory re-commissioning project respectively. Also attending was President Elect Michael Cowger, Vice President Elect Al Reisz, last year's POY Melissa Snider and her husband Ron, year before last's POY, Jeff Delmas, and our Treasurer, Gena Crook and her husband Bob. HATS is a non-profit association of technical and professional societies in the Huntsville area that is dedicated to the advancement of science and engineering. VBAS, known as the Rocket City Astronomical Association at the time, is one of seven charter members since HATS was founded on June 17th, 1969.

VBAS Board Meeting Minutes

7 PM on Thursday, May 28, 2009

Attendees:

Neil Boyd (Director of Administration elect)
 Michael Cowger (Past and Future President)
 Gena Crook (Treasurer)
 Jeff Delmas (Director of Planning & Research)
 Doug Horacek (Resident Astronomer)
 David Lofts (Student Director)
 Steve Sloan (Secretary)

Jeff called the meeting to order at 7:13 PM.

The minutes from the previous meeting were presented. Gena was at the previous meeting, but not listed as an attendee, so she needed to be added. **Michael moved to approve the minutes as amended, and Gena seconded. The motion carried.**

Gena presented the treasurer's report. She showed Profit and Loss for April 1 through May 28, and the year to date finances. Admission fees are over budget, which is good, and the newsletter is over budget due to postage increases, which is not so good. There was further discussion of minor things to change. **Michael moved to approve the treasurer's report as amended, Steve seconded, and the motion carried.**

Discussion of roof leaks and tree cutting was tabled without the Facilities Director.

Discussion of member survey and member dues updates was tabled without the Membership Secretary.

Michael discussed web action items.

Tom Burlison has written the audit report, and it's in.

Gena reported that we got a \$500 donation from Invariant Corporation in honor of Richard Simms. Gena will send an acknowledgement.

Astronomy Day was discussed. Michael spoke to Melissa, she recommends holding it on an October weekend near the first quarter moon

HATS Person of the Year ceremony will be held June 11. Our nomination is due June 1. **Gena nominated John Young as our outgoing president, as long as she doesn't have to do the pa-**

perwork. **Jeff seconded.** Wait, he'll be out of town. **Michael moved to amend the nomination to nominate James Brelsford, with the stipulation that if he declines or can't be there, John Young will be the nominee. David seconded, and the motion carried.**

Discussion of the membership application process was tabled without the Membership Secretary.

Michael moved that we recommend that John appoint Lorin Arnold as librarian. Gena seconded, and the motion carried.

Upcoming sidewalk astronomy events were discussed. Michael talked about the events to be held in July at the Huntsville Botanical Gardens, where we will treat donors and potential donors to dinner. We will hold other events in local state parks. We will resume sidewalk astronomy at the Concerts in the Park. Doug suggested that if we move Astronomy Day to October, we should hold a Bridge Street event the previous weekend, when Jupiter and the Moon will be visible. Is that Big Spring Jam weekend?

Planetarium and observer training were discussed. Michael told the board that we should consider ways members can help. The Huntsville High School astronomy club is looking for planetarium and observer training.

At the previous members meeting, Neil Boyd was elected Director of Administration, with his term beginning in July. **Michael moved that we recommend that John appoint Neil Boyd as Director of Administration in the interim. Gena seconded, and the motion carried.**

An unpaid volunteer internship program was discussed.

Discussion of a science teacher workshop was tabled.

Jeff suggested that we begin better accounting for shows and attendance, to give him better data to wow potential donors for fundraising purposes. We don't want to add to the treasurer's work load, however. Michael volunteered to type information from the logbooks into Excel. Someone else will gather the information, then send it to the treasurer. Gena as treasurer

can't handle any more work. Perhaps the Director of Administration can do it.

Doug asked if we can change the regular board meeting night from the fourth Thursday of the month to the fourth Tuesday. Gena won't be available on Tuesdays during the school year. The next meeting will be either Thursday June 25, or Tuesday June 23. We will coordinate the meeting date and time via email.

Michael moved to adjourn, and Gena seconded.

Stellar Events for July

by Doug Horacek

On 9 July 2009, Neptune will be 34 minutes north-northwest of Jupiter when they are closest, and Mu Capricorni, a 5th magnitude star, will be in the field of view between the two planets. On 13 July 2009, Neptune will be 37 minutes from Jupiter with Mu Capricorni in between. Both planets are in retrograde and you should be able to see them near each other from 9-13 July 2009. At dawn on July 18-19, Venus, the crescent waning moon, the Hyades Cluster, the Pleiades Cluster, and Mars will all be in the predawn sky together for you early risers. In the evening sky on 23-25 July 2009, Saturn and Mercury will be in the evening sky. Mercury will be low on the horizon, and Saturn will be well above the horizon moving ever closer to the Sun. Saturn will be approaching Sigma Leonis as Saturn settles closer and

closer to the western horizon throughout the month of July. On 25-27 July, Saturn will be 20 minutes north of 4th magnitude Sigma Leonis.

There are two minor and one major meteor shower in Late July. The Piscis Austrinid and Alpha Capricornids both peak on 28 July 2009. The waxing gibbous moon should set in the early morning, so you should be able to see meteors from these showers early in the morning. The associated comet for Piscis Austrinids is P/Temple-Tuttle; the Alpha Capricornids is Swift-Tuttle 1862 II. The major shower for this month peaks on the morning of 30 July 2009; the Delta Aquarid shower's associated comet is 96P/Machholtz. The moon will set later on the 30th of July and will be a fuller waxing gibbous moon.

VOL. 37, ISSUE 7

VIA STELLARIS

JULY, 2009

Contributions to Via Stellaris

We encourage contributions to the journal

VIA STELLARIS



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A Publication of the
Von Braun Astronomical Society
A Member of the Astronomical League
P. O. Box 1142
Huntsville, AL 35807-1142

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