



Capitol Skies

The Newsletter of the Madison Astronomical Society

From the President's Desktop

Introducing Don Martin.

I'd like to introduce myself to MAS members I have not met in person as yet. While I hope to meet each one of you in person, that will take time, so the next best alternative is through Capitol Skies.

Although a recent member of MAS, having joined only three years ago, my interest in astronomy and as an amateur astronomer goes back to Christmas morning 1959 when I received my first telescope – tragically it was another of those “not so good” telescopes that seem to get placed under Christmas trees, like unwanted flotsam & jetsam, doing more harm than good in generating and keeping the recipient's interest in astronomy.

Has anyone else wondered, as I've often done, how many fledgling amateurs (and even some who might have become professionals) were so turned off by department store telescopes that they give up, turning instead to other pursuits? I suspect over the years it has been astronomical. lol

It would be interesting to know just how many, but then I suppose it would be another exercise in futility, so best to move ahead and do what we can to promote a better understanding of astronomy among the public, as well as what we do as amateur

astronomers. This is especially so if the statistics on the dropping scientific knowledge of US citizens is true.

I'd hate to see astrology replace astronomy as the vehicle for studying the stars, but it's possible for that to come to pass.

From that first 2” refractor (the instructions said to use a wooden step ladder as a pedestal and mount to view the stars and planets), I moved onto Edmund Scientific and A Jaegers optics, mounts and accessories. I joined the San Francisco Amateur Astronomy Club in 1961, took a course titled “Popular Astronomy” at the California Academy of Sciences Morrison Planetarium from George W Burton in 1961 (I still have the certificate signed by Dr. Burton), and in 1962 I joined the San Mateo Astronomy Club where I served as treasurer and secretary while in high school.

With the advent of exciting travel opportunities after high school to fun places like Germany and South Viet Nam, Not, I landed in Denver and joined the Denver Astronomical Society. I've owned a 4-1/4” Newtonian, an 8” Dynamax, a 12-1/4” Newtonian, which I traded for a 6” Jaeger refractor.

My astronomical interests have varied from planetary to stellar and galactic astronomy, but unable to solve Einstein's Field Equations in my head, I decided to just become an arm chair theorist and let the guys with the big time brains, and big time super computers, solve the equations while I sat and read and absorbed what I could. [My understanding is that the Field Equations have still not be solved beyond a rudimentary level, so maybe it was a good idea for me to stop before I over taxed my brain].

Those of us that go back to the 1960s have seen some amazing leaps in our knowledge of the universe, all the way from the quark level to the macro level of super clusters of galaxies; the development of so many new instruments and some amazing upgrading of many existing instruments; and finally, the development of nascent computers in the late 1950's to the powerful super computers of today. But whom, in 1980, would have believed that Apple Computer would deliver top end Desk Top Macs that rival in number crunching power the early super computers?

And an awful lot of these advancements are tied directly or indirectly into the early days of the

From the president, cont. from front page...

space program; a time when the public was interested in and scientific knowledge among the citizenry was also higher. So one wonders, even if only a coincidence, that the demise of NASA as a top notch agency helped contribute to the decline in America's scientific knowledge and interest, including astronomy.

In terms of MAS and the Madison/Dane County communities, there are a number of issues of importance that we need to engage in constructive dialogues about within MAS in the coming months and years. What would I like to accomplish as president?

1. Increasing membership is at the top of my list, and is the first issue of importance to me.

Some of the other issues, not in any particular priority order are:

2. The decline in the number of "eye piece" amateurs as a threat to the long-term survival of MAS as an effective organization.

3. Maintenance and upgrade of equipment expenses at YRS will become bigger and more compelling issues as time goes by, especially with the rising cost of gas for transportation to do observing.

Specifically, the issues fall into several categories:

A. Lack of replacement parts for some of our current scopes.

B. Structural integrity of one of the telescope buildings.

C. General maintenance of the buildings and ground over the years (the things that need to be addressed on an ongoing basis, like mowing the lawn, light bulb replacement, etc.).

D. Identifying potential problems now and then determining what steps we should be taking now so that we are prepared to deal with them when they occur. In most cases, it is a matter of having the necessary funds available to successfully deal with the issues.

E. Speakers for our monthly meetings.

F. Outreach activities to Madison and Dane County. These activities should include the public at large (like Moon Over Monona), and youth oriented outreach activities.

G. Energize the Club.

These are some that come to mind at present, if any one has others, please feel free to send me an e-mail (martido@tds.net) or phone me at 231-0197.

As a recent member, I doubtlessly see things differently in some areas from those of you who are long term members. So what I see in holding various dialogues on the issues at board meetings, our monthly meetings, in committee meetings, and through e-mail, telephone and face-to-face talks, is

to bring the views of both newer and long term members into a juxtaposition that will result in the best possible decisions we can make for the future of MAS and YRS.

It is important that we listen to the views, ideas, and opinions all MAS members in a constructive and respectful way if we are to successfully deal with the issues time will bring our way.

And as for me, please feel free to share any of your views, ideas, suggestions and opinions with me as and when it seems appropriate to you. I welcome any and all input, but cannot guarantee any specific ideas or recommendations will be implemented, after all, final decisions are up to the board and/or membership as a whole.

I hope to see you at the August meeting where I'll try and introduce myself to all those I have not met as yet. For those who can't make it in August, I hope to meet you in the near future. I also plan to call all the members at some point in the next four to six weeks so I can at least intro myself to those I have not met and get some feedback on (1) your involvement in MAS, (2) what you see as important issues, and (3) what you see as the strong and weak points of MAS.

Until next issue of Capitol Skies, have a safe month and enjoy the stars, at least when we have clear skies!

Calendar of Events

Aug 8, 2008	MAS monthly meeting, 7:30 pm, Speaker TBA. Business meeting to follow the main presentation. Space Place, 2300 S. Park Street.
Aug 12, 2008	Space Place guest speaker: 7:00 pm. "Finding Exo-Planets: How to do it yourself." by Bob Manske, Milwaukee Astronomical Society. Space Place, 2300 S. Park Street.
Sep 9, 2008	Space Place guest speaker: 7:00 pm. "The Moon and the Capitol: A 21st Century Stonehenge." by John Rummel, Madison Astronomical Society. Space Place, 2300 S. Park Street.
Sep 12, 2008	MAS monthly meeting, 7:30 pm, Speaker TBA. Business meeting to follow the main presentation. Space Place, 2300 S. Park Street.
Sep 17, 2008	MMSD Planetarium Public Programs, 6:30 and 7:45 pm (programs are one hour): Skywatching , Explore the current night sky in the planetarium, learning how to identify constellations, planets, and interesting telescope and binocular targets so that you will be able to find them in the real sky. Tickets: \$2. No reservations. Tickets go on sale starting at 6:00 PM. Some shows do sell out. Memorial High School, corner of Gammon and Mineral Point..

For Sale

Meade LXD55, SN-10 as shown; finder scope and Meade AutoStar goto. Ultra High Transmission Coating. Virtually never used.

\$450.00.

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