

# SIDEREAL TIMES

The Official Publication of the  
Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton

**Director**

John Miller

**Treasurer**

Michael Mitrano

**Program Chairman**

Ludy D'Angelo

**Assistant Director**

John Church

**Secretary**

Ron Mittelstaedt

**Editors**

Bryan Hubbard and Ira Polans

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## From the Director



How many of you made it to this year's NEAF? For those readers unfamiliar with the acronym, it's the "Northeast Astronomy Forum and Telescope Show." Now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year, the event was held at the Rockland County Community College field house, Suffern, NY. NEAF is one of the (if not *the*) largest amateur astronomy trade show and conferences in the United States. Every major vendor, equipment manufacturer, and active astro-entrepreneur is probably in attendance or rents booth space. If you're an

equipment junkie, this is the place. This year, AAAP member Dr. Mary Lou West and Princeton University astrophysicist Neta Bahcall were keynote speakers. I made my annual trek to the Questar booth where CEO Don Bandurick watched me pine over a 3.5" Standard, as I do every year. Don went uncharacteristically into sales mode, but I held my VISA close to the vest, defending the need for gasoline, cereal and milk before the \$4,200 (that's \$49.00 per millimeter of aperture, folks) engineering jewel of a scope.

Speaking of jewels, has any reader not yet viewed Saturn, fitting like a gold nugget around Leo's neck? Reserve a clear sky Friday evening and come view Saturn at your Simpson Observatory. The

open house season is upon us; AAAP members have entertained colleagues and the public for two (out of four possible) Friday nights. Of course, the C 14 and Hastings-Byrne 6.25 will be pointing at a lot more than the sixth planet from the sun; but the ringed one is always a hit with visitors, and very often elicits the comment that it appears "unreal" or like a 3-D picture in the eyepiece. A note is usually posted at the top of the web site main page indicating whether or not the observatory will open (weather dependent), so give it a look Friday afternoons.

For those of you preferring to study the universe from an armchair, I've found a fun new book written by local New Jersey amateur astronomer Fred Schaaf. Fred is a prolific astrowriter as demonstrated by his monthly *Sky & Telescope* column and many monographs. This latest offering is titled, "*The Brightest Stars – Discovering the Universe through the Sky's Most Brilliant Stars*". Schaaf presents a useful blend of science, mythology and reference to make this a fun read and helpful review for cocktail chat or public outreach instruction. It's a Wiley paperback, reasonably priced at \$20, perhaps we might invite Fred as a presenter for next season's venue. If you think this is a good idea, please let our program chair, Ludy D'Angelo know (that's true for any speaker idea you have as well, of course).

If you're more in the magazine mood, newcomer *Astronomy Technology Today* might be just the ticket. Aimed at equipment junkies, this monthly is skillfully published by Gary and Stuart Parkerson, out of Shreveport, LA. Chockfull of ads (not at all pleasing either S&T or Astronomy), equipment reviews and feature articles, this mag is growing exponentially in the amateur astronomy market. Stuart kindly (coupled with good business sense) offered me a box of free copies at NEAF. I'll bring some to the May meeting.

For many years your astronomy club has been represented at the New Jersey State Museum "Super Science Weekend." May 17 & 18 are this year's dates, from 11AM to 4PM each day. Dozens of booths are set up outdoors featuring all areas of the sciences. AAAP members will bring solar telescopes and astronomy-related literature to excite families about the rewards of the hobby (and learning science in general). Please come by the booth and say hello to your fellow astronomers!

**The deadline for the June issue is:**

**May 20, 2008**

**Send your submissions to:**

**[editors@princetonastronomy.org](mailto:editors@princetonastronomy.org)**

**Cheers—John Miller, Director**

## Report of the AAAP Nomination Committee

The slate of nominees for the election of Officers for the 2008-2009 season of the AAAP is as follows:

**Director:** John Miller  
**Assistant Director:** John Church  
**Secretary:** Larry Kane  
**Treasurer:** Michael Mitrano  
**Program Chairman:** Ludy D'Angelo

Nominations can be made up to the actual vote, which will occur at the May 13th general meeting. If anyone is interested in serving in one of these positions, please contact Georgette or Bob North.

*Georgette and Bob North*

**Public Outreach:** Recent events have been a success. There has been a request for manning the observatory on Saturday April 27th. This is the weekend of the Northeast Astronomy Forum and could be hard to support. Super Science Weekend was discussed. This event will be held on May 17th and 18th from 11am to 4pm each day. Public Outreach chairman Jeff Bernardis will develop a schedule of 2.5 hour shifts per member for this daytime event. Solar observing and discussing astronomy with the public is the order of the day.

**Starquest:** A deposit of \$200 will be sent to the Hope Center. This is for three cabins. Oct. 24th-26th are the dates for this event. We are going to verify the cost of last year's event and will negotiate the cost for this year.

Archivist Larry Kane has announced that he has picked up two sets of DVDs one "Fifty Years of Space Exploration" is a four disk set; the other is season one of the History Channel's "The Universe". Contact Larry if you wish to borrow either of these programs.

*Ron Mittelstaedt, Secretary*

## Membership Meeting Minutes April 8, 2008

Thanks were given to Linda Papetti for the fine refreshments she brings for every membership meeting. The membership has insisted that she be paid for her money out of pocket but has refused payment. Thanks Linda.

**Observatory:** Final approval of the Televue 13mm Ethos eyepiece was approved by the general membership for a cost of \$575.00. The eyepiece is at the observatory for members use. Ron Mittelstaedt put the Nagler 7mm, 13mm, and 16mm eyepieces from the observatory on Astromart where they sold for a total of \$442.86 which will offset the cost of the 13mm TeleVue Ethos.

All the new storage cabinets are installed in the observatory. Gene Ramsey and John Church will break up the old furniture and will remove most of it to the dumpster at the park.

Key holder training is in progress.

**Washington Crossing and Jenny Jump:** As of this writing, The Department of Environmental Protection is proposing to close nine state parks entirely, slash services at three more, and reduce off season hours at all 42 sites. The AAAP Simpson observatory at Washington Crossing State Park seems not to be affected except possibly for reduced hours. Members have a separate entrance. The Jenny Jump State Park is slated to be closed entirely. This is the location of our observatory that houses our 12.5" Parks Newtonian. Recently there has been a 1.2 million government grant to New Jersey Institute of Technology to install a 48" telescope at the Jenny Jump location. This is a research type telescope and will have to be modified for visual astronomy. This addition could be the saving grace for the United Astronomy Clubs of NJ facility.

**Programs:** A picnic has been suggested to replace the usual June meeting. It would be at the Observatory at Washington Crossing on Friday the 13th at 6pm. Rain date will be Saturday June 14th. Hopefully the picnic will conclude before the general public arrives.

## Treasurer's Report

A few more new or renewing members have raised total dues for the fiscal year to \$4,200 (105 members).

The Association recently sold three seldom-used eyepieces for \$438 in total, which offset most of the \$584 cost of the new 13mm Ethos eyepiece.

With two months remaining, the current fiscal year's surplus is \$2,519. The Association's cumulative surplus is \$14,965.

*Michael Mitrano, Treasurer*

## From the Program Chair

Our April meeting was the last meeting in Peyton Hall until it is renovated. We will be moving to the Friend Center (near the Engineering Quad) for our May meeting. Hopefully by September the repairs will be finished. There will be no formal June meeting. We will meet for our annual picnic instead. Stay tuned for the date and time!

Iro Tasitsiomi gave a wonderful overview of her views and research on cosmology. Current trends in cosmology (not cosmetology!) were discussed. A very engaging question and answer session followed her talk. Thanks to Steve Krisocki for the pictures

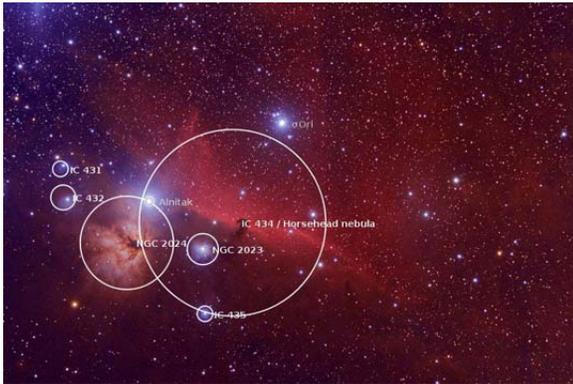


*Dr. Tasitsiomi makes a point during her lecture*



Our next guest to the club on May 13th will be David Hogg from New York University and the Center for Cosmology & Particle Physics. The title of his talk is "Astrometry.net: Automated calibration of amateur astronomy imaging data for scientific research"

David Hogg received his PhD in 1998 from the California Institute of Technology, has been a long term member of the Institute for Advanced Study and is currently associate professor at NYU. Hogg and his team are building an "astrometry engine" to create correct, standards-compliant astrometric meta data for every useful astronomical image ever taken, past and future, in any state of archival disarray.



David's main research interests involve study of the formation of galaxies in a cosmological context. Currently, he is working on observational evidence for the fundamental processes of cosmogony at late epochs: clustering, accretion, and merging.

Please join us at the Friend Center on May 13<sup>th</sup>. Look for directions on the website. Prior to the meeting, as always, there will be a pre-meeting dinner at Sotto's restaurant. Please contact me to reserve a spot and as always send any comments and suggestions to me at

Ludovico D'Angelo, Program Chair

### AAAP May Meeting Location Change

The May 13th meeting of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton will meet in Friends Center Room 101.

This is the large auditorium in the new Friends Center building (we've used it for a prior meeting or two). Meeting hours remain the same as usual: 8PM through 10PM.

Use this campus map, and choose "Friends Center" on the drop-down menu: <http://www.princeton.edu/~pumap>

## Picture This—Orion Nebula Region

Spanning across the image you will notice the unmistakable emission nebula we know as M42, but as a bonus to the upper left is NGC1977, a blue reflection nebula also known as The Running Man.

As many of you may know I have been learning the ropes using a new camera. I picked up a Canon 350XT Rebel DSLR, and have been using it whenever I get a chance, for more hands on experience. This month's image being the first taken with this new (to me) camera, is one I wanted to make a statement with. So what other DSO could fit the bill? Taken from my back yard early this winter, this image is composed of over 40x3 minutes exposures through an Orion ED80 refractor. I spent quite some time afterwards working the images into my final result.



Brian Van Liew

## Interested in keyholder training?

Contact: cell phone or by

cell phone

## Community Outreach

This was a quiet month for outreach – there were no events on our calendar. I have included another photograph from last month's Princyclopedia.



We only have 1 event on our upcoming calendar:

- May 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> (Saturday and Sunday) from 11AM to 4PM each day, is the New Jersey State Museum’s Super Science Weekend. This has become a staple event for us. This is a daytime outdoor event for solar observing. Because it is two days, and because each day is 5 hours long, we really need your help with this one; if we have enough volunteers, we can break each day into 2 shifts.

People currently signed up for this event are: myself, John Miller, Brian Van Liew, Ron Mittelstaedt, Bill Murray, and Larry Kane; more are welcome.

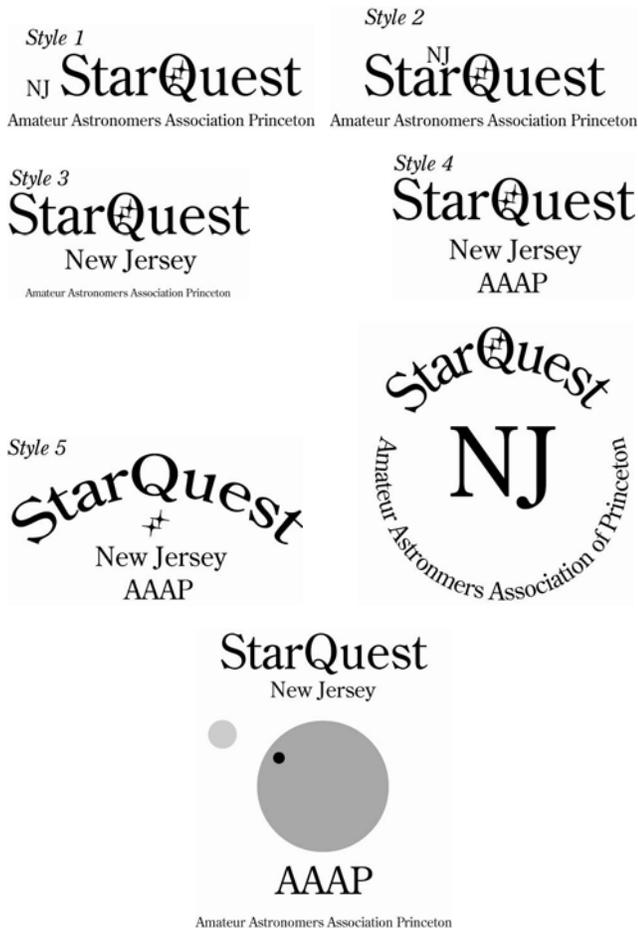
If you are at all interested in helping out with this, or other future events, please let me know as soon as possible at

As other events are scheduled, you can find out about them here, or on the calendar that is on our web site.

*Jeff Bernardis*

## Starquest Designs

We have, in the past had tee shirts printed for StarQuest. The member who had the designs created is no longer with us so I took it upon myself to make some suggestions. The following are by no means exhaustive, but are a starting point for membership approval and eventual use, whether for tee shirts or any other item which seems appropriate.



*Bryan Hubbard*

## Other News...

### Recent News About Washington Crossing

Gene Ramsey and Saul Moroz took part in the large demonstration at the State House on April 23 in support of keeping the New Jersey State Parks up and running. This demonstration was front-page news in the Trenton Times on Thursday, April 24. Thanks to Gene and Saul for doing their part in drawing attention to the current plight of the parks.

There is some major good news about the Bear Tavern Road driveway. The local soccer association paid for resurfacing this driveway all the way past the soccer fields, taking out the major potholes that had been inhibiting not only access to the fields, but also our own access (and the public's) to our observatory. The crew that did the resurfacing had some material left over, which they used to partially fill in the potholes in the dirt part of the driveway that leads down to Brickyard Road. Gene is taking the initiative to contact park headquarters to see if the AAAP can get permission to fill in the potholes completely with crushed rock. He is also obtaining an estimate for this job. This would be a major benefit to all concerned, and Gene will be reporting on this progress at the May meeting.

*Submitted by John Church*

### Star Party Experiences

Ron Mittelstaedt wrote a great article in the March 2008 *Sidereal Times* about star parties. I’m not a seasoned observer like Ron, but I’d like to share my experiences as a novice. My wife, daughter and I attended two star parties last year for the first time. The first was the Mason Dixon Star Party sponsored by the York County Astronomical Society ([www.ycas.org](http://www.ycas.org)) at the Shreveport Airport / Footlight Ranch in Wellsville, PA.

MDSP was a great introduction for us because the star party is very family friendly. The site has a pool to keep spouses and kids occupied during the day, and they host a free barbeque picnic on Saturday afternoon. In addition to the adult-oriented lectures, Norm Lewis, the Chief Meteorologist for ABC2News in Baltimore marked out the Solar System to scale on the taxi-way with the kids.

The party is held at the end of July so the weather is warm for camping out. I recommend bringing your own camping gear and avoiding the “hut”. If the conditions don’t “bug” you, the banging bathroom doors will keep you awake 24/7.

We were lucky to have clear skies both nights that we were there. The Milky Way was clearly visible overhead through Aquila, Cygnus and Cassiopeia. We met some interesting people, got to look through some amazing scopes and really enjoyed ourselves.

Our second outing was to Stella Della sponsored by the Bucks-Mont Astronomical Association ([www.bma2.org](http://www.bma2.org)) at Camp Onas in Ottsville, PA in mid-October. Like MSDP, Stella Della tries to keep the kid’s interest up but the cold weather put a damper on the activities. The Ken Kremer’s talk about Mars and the Saturday night all-you-can-eat pizza party were hits.

The end of astronomical twilight is early in October so everyone got their scope ready early but disaster struck quickly. After clear blue skies all day, the sky conditions deteriorated quickly as a thick haze developed. By 9:30 PM, heavy dew shut everyone down. I called it quits and hunkered down for the night. Around 2:00 AM, I awoke to find the haze had cleared. To my amazement, I was looking at Perseus,

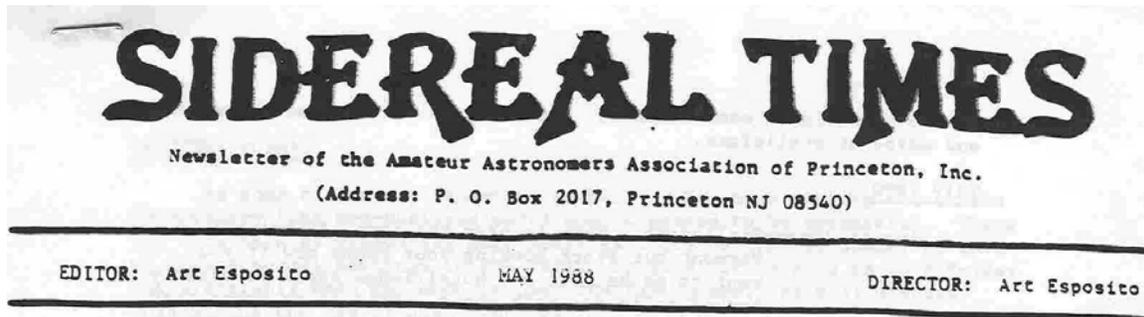
Taurus and Orion high in the darkest, clearest sky I had ever seen. I was blown away. Unfortunately, I could not use my scope or binoculars due to the heavy dew, so I just stared in awe.

We thought that we would be smart this time and camp out, but we did not realize how cold it could get in October. When we awoke in the morning, the heavy dew had frozen on our tent and the tripod legs that I had left standing outside.

Undaunted, we're looking forward to this year's star party season and plan on attending MSDP, Starquest and maybe Black Forrest. AOS Starfest was on our list, but our daughter just informed us she is going to the prom that weekend, so Mom has to be home. Didn't the high school check their ephemeris before they scheduled the prom on a dark sky weekend? How inconsiderate!

*Submitted by Michael Wright*

## 20 Years Ago In Sidereal Times...



### AAAP -CALENDAR

May 10-----Meeting at 8PM, Peyton Hall/Princeton University. This is members night. A business meeting will follow, including the election of new officers.

June 14-----Meeting at the New Jersey State Planetarium in Trenton. This is our annual planetarium show, hosted by former AAAP Director Dick Peery.

August 13----Stellafane, at Breezy Hill near Springfield, Vermont  
August 19,20-Beemerville trip, at the Rutgers 4-H Camp.

NOTE: All pre-meeting dinners will be held at the TIGER'S TALE Restaurant at 5:45 PM. It is located near Rocky Hill at the intersection of Routes 518 and 206. There will not be a pre-meeting dinner for May.

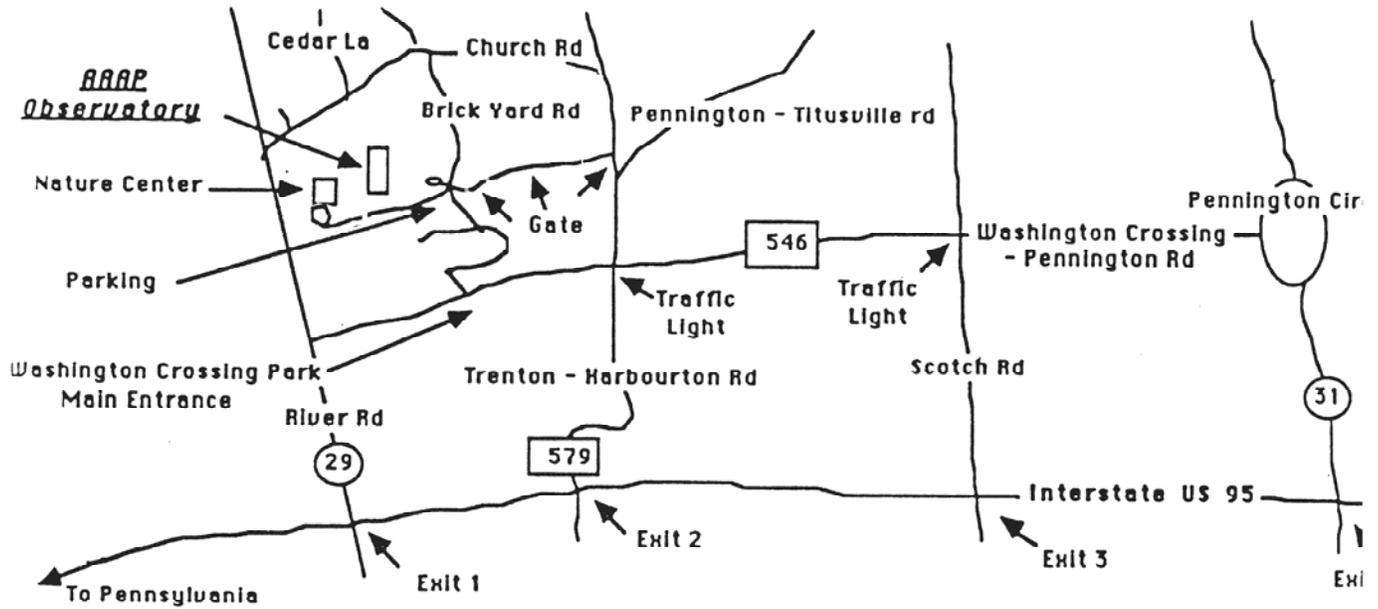
### FROM THE DIRECTOR

This will be my last edition of the Sidereal Times as Director. I have had an interesting two years at the helm and if there is one thing that stands out, it was the fact that we finally paid off the Simpson scope without going deep into the financial black hole.

I am also glad that we did not have to raise the dues too often during the last two years. It takes money to operate an observatory and I was heartened by the fact that people volutarily gave some cash to pay the scope off and get an oscillator for the 6-inch refractor. Now, we have to get a star-diagonal for the same scope and we must work on that roof. For those of you who remember my paranoid ravings in this space back in late 1986 and early 1987 dealing with the finances, I must confess that they were not exaggerations. I was afraid that we would have a problem with cash flow in the club but it seems (fortunately) that my fears were for nought.

However, one recent trend seems to be continuing and that is the streak of lousy Friday nights for observing at the Observatory. There was another break about two weeks ago but that clear night featured a first quarter moon. As I write this bit, it has been raining off and on for the last two weeks and all off the days have been cloudy.

As I sign off, hopefully I will not contract the dreaded disease known as "Post-Director Syndrome" in which the symptoms are non-participation in club activities, not attending club meetings, and generally disappearing from view. However, I will be unable to attend any meetings until January, 1989,



The best way to get to the observatory is to take Interstate 95 South towards Pennsylvania. Then take Scotch road at Exit 3 and proceed north (this amounts to right). Then, at the third traffic light take a left onto the Washington Crossing-Pennington road (County Route 546). Take this road to the first traffic light and take a right onto Trenton-Harbourton road (County Route 579). Take this road to the first driveway on the left, this is the Phillips Farm/Soccer Field entrance to the park. There is a series of three gates with club combination locks. If the gates are not open, you will need the lock combination to open the gate or be accompanied by a Keyholder member. The Simpson (AAAP) Observatory's phone number is (609) 737-2575.

See us on the Web: [www.princetonastronomy.org](http://www.princetonastronomy.org)

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