



March 2006 Newsletter of the Omaha Astronomical Society Issue 219

Rita Livengood receives her Binocular Messier Certificate



General Meeting of the
Omaha Astronomical Society
Friday, March 3rd at 7:30 PM
Durham Science Center, Room 169
UNO Campus
Program: See Page 3

Events

March Club Star Party

25 March, 2006

OAS Club Site, Weeping Water

Mahoney Public Star Parties

May 19, 2006

June 16, 2006

July 14, 2006

August 11, 2006

September 15, 2006

All Friday evenings from Twilight On the Golf Driving Range of the Mahoney State Park Ashland, NE

Visit the club web site at: **www.OmahaAstro.com**

Save the club money... and get your newsletter in full color by signing up for the email edition of the Stella. Signing up is easy... just send an e-mail to:

mweiss4@cox.net

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BULLETINS

March Meeting Presentation

Astronomy for Beginner's Observing Series #3.

“The Celestial Sphere & Constellations”

Good March Dates to Observe at the OAS Club Site or at any other good location

Friday 24 Mar, last quarter moon
Saturday 25 Mar, last quarter moon
Friday 31 Mar, new moon
Saturday 1 Apr, new moon

Upcoming Events

“Lost Spacecraft” Speaker Series at
Strategic Air & Space Museum
“The Lost Spacecraft” speaker series will be on the
following dates at 11:00 a.m.

March 11—Valerie Neal (Space History Curator)

March 25—Astronaut Scott Carpenter (Mercury 7)

April 8—Astronaut Clayton Anderson (Nebraska)

April 22—Captain Scott Grissom (Pilot)

March Astronomy Quiz

1. What do these stars have in **common**? Delta Cygni, Beta Cephei (also known as Alkirk), 41 Aquarii, and Beta Scorpii.
2. Which 2 **Saturnian satellites** change places (as to which one is orbiting closer to Saturn) about every four years?
3. This **constellation** contains the 2nd brightest globular cluster visible from Earth (4th magnitude). Which is it?
4. What would look **different** about Saturn through a telescope in **2009**?
5. The **International Astronomical Union** formally adopted 88 standard constellations and their Latin names in a) 1895 b) 1929 or c) 1930.
6. This **constellation** is the second smallest in size and contains, as it's alpha star, Hamal, meaning "the Lamb." Which is it?
7. **T or F** The combined mass of all known **asteroids** would be less than that of our moon.
8. 335 years ago Giovanni Cassini discovered a **moon** of Saturn that seemed to **disappear** for part of it's orbit. Which satellite is it and why is it visible only part of the time?
9. Where would you find **Egeria** and **Eugenia** and what else do they have in common?
10. **Who** wrote,
"Many a night I saw the Pleiades, rising thro' the mellow shade
Glitter like a swarm of fireflies, tangled in a silver braid."

ASTRONOMY NOTE

Planetary Radio airs locally at 10 AM on Thursdays on KIOS-FM. (91.5) The show is produced by the Planetary Society and discusses astronomy and space exploration. One recent program was an interview with the director of the James Webb Infrared Telescope program at NASA.

March Sky Calendar

2nd Groundhog Day
5th First Quarter Moon
12th Full Moon
21st Last Quarter Moon
27th New Moon

Recent Observing Awards

Rita Livengood - Binocular Messier Certificate

New Members

Alan Brooks of Omaha
John Schiaparelli of Omaha

NASA's Mars Rovers to Hit the Silver Screen

By [Tariq Malik](#)

NASA's hardy twin robots Spirit and Opportunity currently roving across the surface of Mars will be immortalized in a fresh documentary about their wildly successful mission.

Disney's new IMAX film [Roving Mars](#), set to open nationwide on Jan. 27, chronicles the exploits of NASA's [Mars Exploration Rover \(MER\) mission](#) that entered its third year exploring the surface of the red planet this month. Originally slated for a 90-Martian day mission, Spirit and Opportunity have consistently surpassed the expectations of their handlers and filmmakers throughout their mission.

"My original idea was to wait for the rovers to die and that it would be a dramatic ending," Roving Mars director George Butler told [SPACE.com](#). "However, these rovers [won't die](#), which is excellent news."

Go to space.com for further information.

Omaha Astronomical Society

Meeting Minutes, for February 3rd, 2006.

Meeting called to order tonight at 7:33 PM. No rooftop observing, 4 guests.

Reports: Secretary Kim Moss-Allen read January minutes. Motion made to accept by Howard Bohm, seconded by Clark Cheney. Bill Bond gave a brief **Treasurer's Report**, with income in January of \$738.70, expenses of \$261.40 and an overall balance of \$4955.42.

Old Business

Observing Committee: Coordinator Clark Cheney. One observer used the Weeping Water site in January. Winter Messier objects up. "SuitSat" is launched today; for a description see January "Stella."

Outreach: None scheduled for January.

OAS Telescope Loan Program Coordinator John Johnson reminded us that the loan program was primarily to allow OAS members to check out different kinds of scopes, learn and experiment, and is a great membership benefit.

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 6 inch Dobsonian | Nena and Clete Baker |
| 6 inch Newtonian | Keith Jones |
| 8 inch SCT | Rita Corell |
| 8 inch Newtonian | Joe Alvarado |
| 13 inch Dobsonian | Chris Jewell |

New Business

Awards Rita Livengood earned the Binocular Messier.

Outreach: Coordinator John Johnson gave the dates for 2006 Public Star Parties at Mahoney State Park: May 19th, June 16th, July 14th, August 11th, and September.15th

An outreach award is coming on line, save your numbers (of participants) if you would like to work on this program. Also May 6th is National Astronomy Day and PAC (Prairie Astronomy Club) in Lincoln is planning events.

Dues Vice President Mark Weiss asks members to check when their membership fee is due (look on your address on your Stella or ask a club officer) and pay their dues on time. (You even have a 3 month grace period before being removed from the role.)

Budget President Al Dorn reported that the observing site in Weeping Water, Astropark, cost the club **\$537** in 2005 and **8** visits were reported, making it a relatively expensive item per use. Discussion was

held on whether this is a good use for our funds and how/when to report use of Astropark. Please let **Mark Weiss** know whenever you use Astropark. Also, sending out the newsletter, the **Stella** electronically saves the club money. We mail about 50 hardcopy issues. **Metro Science and Engineering Fair** Saturday , March 11th. Al Dorn is donating 2 pair of binoculars and 2 planispheres for prizes for astronomy related projects (one junior level and one senior level.) Asked for volunteer judges, yes from John Johnson, Rita (and possibly Chuck) Livengood, and Kim Moss-Allen. Some discussion of what it would take to create an astronomy category in the Fair, POC, \$, find list of possible projects. Also for prizes Eric Balcom motioned to include red light, seconded by Rita Corel and passed. John Artherton motioned to include a student membership in the club and the magazine, "Night Sky,"; it was seconded by Deb Cheney and passed by the membership.

Observing "tool" George Allen shared an inexpensive way to observe more comfortably; a crib mattress costs about \$30 and offers comfort and insulation from the ground.

Astronomy magazine for \$29.95? A member saw this low price and will check it out further to see if it's legitimate.

IMAX outing PAC and OAS members are invited to the SAC Museum at 1200 for the new exhibit, "The Lost Capsule," and the Henry Dourly Zoo for the 4 PM showing of "Magnificent Desolation, Walking on the Moon, 3D"

PAC/OAS Banquet We will be sharing responsibility for the October banquet. PAC already has a coordinator, who has been doing it for years and has been doing a good job, and we need an OAS member to help, see and officer if this sounds like an opportunity for you.

Outdoor Lighting Clete Baker brought up the point that a program called "Omaha by Design" will be planning to beautify areas around town. It's another place you can voice ideas for good lighting as opposed to light spillage.

Next General Meeting: Friday, March 3rd, 7:30 PM

Motion to Adjourn business meeting made by Gary Grimes, seconded by Deb Cheney, and passed by membership.

February Program: *Astronomy for Beginner's Observing Series #2, Celestial Sphere and Constellations*

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Moss-Allen
OAS Secretary

City Lights or Dark Nights ...
It's Up to You to Decide

by Clete Baker

Last January the Omaha city council eased restrictions on outdoor lighting to now allow fixtures to radiate all the way up to 90 degrees, or parallel with the ground. In a city where the former restrictions were largely ignored anyway, this is more bad news for astronomers and environmentalists. Enforcement has historically been complaint driven, and with few complainants around, there exists an abundance of fixtures in the field already which "meet" the new regulation. So the good news is that we probably won't notice a sudden surge in aesthetically offensive lighting, as some of it's already been there for a while, legal or not. Nonetheless it's demoralizing to note how much erosion of the night sky has taken place in our community, and realize that those who could promote restraint against its further decline, and even reverse the trend toward improvement ... IF they chose to do so ... are, in fact, blind to all arguments. Appeals to aesthetics, safety, energy conservation and just plain common sense are no match for the contemplation of a single lawsuit resulting from NOT having enough lumens diffused over the entire cityscape.

Ah, but hope springs eternal. If the concept of TARGETED use of APPROPRIATE candlepower is beyond the city government's comprehension, perhaps we citizens can take matters into our own hands! And here's the opportunity to do just that. But it requires YOUR participation to make it happen.

Perhaps you've heard or read about Omaha By Design, a coalition of architects, engineers, neighborhood improvement committees, artists, realtors, city planners and other officials who have created a master plan for Omaha's future urban development. Under this master plan the city is divided into a multitude of Neighborhood Alliances, each of which will be the focus of attention in coming weeks and months as businesses and residents are called out to help identify strengths and weaknesses, problems and solutions in their region of the city to be actively addressed by future development both public and private. The first Neighborhood Alliance to begin this self-assessment is the Benson area into which my business recently moved. I participated in the first of what will become dozens of similar public meetings throughout the city, and found that among the very things OUR community finds imperative are aesthetics, safety, energy conservation, and just plain common sense. Sound familiar?

In fact, among the many design elements included in Omaha By Design's master plan is lighting. Not strings of pearls, not beacons, not multi-hued, sky-firing candlepower canons, but TARGETED lighting. EFFICIENT lighting. I took the opportunity after the meeting to buttonhole one of the leaders of the project and spoke with him in explicit terms about my concern for retaining as much of the dark sky as is possible in an urban setting. He was very receptive, which I found refreshing. He assured me that the designers behind the plan are conscious of making street and building illumination as efficient and effective as possible, despite regulation which is more permissive.

I walked out of the meeting feeling that these visionaries will be able to stand their ground where city government tucked tail and ran out on us. They do see the bigger picture. However the intent of these meetings is to prioritize the elements most often cited by citizens as problems to address or features to promote. To that end they're openly taking input from hundreds of people in each neighborhood. To keep this toward the top of the priority list requires that several of those hundreds of people in each neighborhood express it as a priority time and time again. That's where you come in.

I urge you to find out when your own Neighborhood Alliance will meet to discuss its issues. It may not be for months yet, but you should receive a formal notice in the mail. When you do, attend and participate. Express your concern in concrete terms. If there is a specific light source in your area which you find particularly egregious, don't be afraid to single it out by example. But by all means, let Omaha By Design know that you see a future Omaha which is concerned about the aesthetics, the safety, the conservation, and the common sense use of its outdoor lighting. Permissive ordinances notwithstanding, if you help by adding your voice we WILL get a future Omaha that's friendlier to astronomers and environmentalists, and to all of its citizens alike.

Astronomy Quiz Answers

1. They are all “**colorful**” **double** stars. Great if you are looking to observe doubles where the member stars have different colors.
2. **Janus and Epimetheus.**
3. It's **Tucana**, the Toucan. And the star cluster is NGC 104 (also known as 47 Tucanae). It's second only to Omega Centauri, which is the largest and brightest globular cluster in the sky.
4. In parts of 2009, Saturn's **rings** will seem to disappear as we go “through the ring plane” of Saturn and will be looking at the rings directly edge on.
5. **c. 1930**
6. **Aries**, the Ram
7. Amazing but **true.**
8. Cassini (the astronomer, not the space probe) guessed that one side of the satellite, **Iapetus**, was **darker** than the other. He was correct, it is about 15 times darker and as it rotates the darker side is less reflective and harder to see.
9. They are **minor planets** (also called asteroids) and are in the Asteroid belt between Jupiter and Mars. They rank 22nd and 23rd in size among known asteroids and are both **about 214 miles** in diameter.
10. **Tennyson**

Resources:

Sky and Telescope, June 2003

Planetary Radio, 16 Feb. 2006

National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Night Sky, 1991

Year in Space Calendar, Starry Messenger Press, 2006

New Comet (C/2006 A1)

The comet is located in the zodiacal constellation of Capricornus, the Sea Goat. Beginning Feb. 27, skywatchers in the Northern Hemisphere can locate it, very low above the horizon, just south of due east about 90 minutes before sunrise. You can use Venus as a guide on this morning: the comet will be situated roughly 7 degrees to the left and slightly below the brilliant planet, the comet will move further away and to the upper left of Venus over the next few weeks.

Comet Pojmanski will be positioned a little higher above the horizon each morning at the start of morning twilight.



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BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- ◆ Members receive the STELLA, our monthly newsletter.
- ◆ Each member is automatically a member of the Astronomical League, the only nation-wide organization for amateur astronomers.
- ◆ Use of the observing site at Weeping Water, NE
- ◆ The opportunity to borrow one of several club-owned telescopes.
- ◆ Organized trips to local observatories, planetariums and museums.
- ◆ Significant savings on subscriptions to **Sky & Telescope** and **Astronomy** magazines.
- ◆ Savings on astronomy books and printed materials.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Regular/Family
\$25.00

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