



The Guide Star



Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

Founded June 9, 1929 by Chester B. Roe and Leo J. Scanlon

Website: 3ap.org



Mingo Creek Park Observatory

December 2005

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Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory



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Let the Festivities Commence: The Annual AAAP Holiday Bash

Compiled from submissions by Ann Norman and Rich Bailey

Our holiday party this year will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, December 9th. The venue is once again the Middle Road Fire Hall (see the November issue of the *GS* for a map). The snow date for this year is December 16th; if the party must be postponed, President Rich Bailey will make the decision by noon on December 8th.

Our festivities this year, as always, are made possible by an exceptionally active cluster of AAAP members. Ann Norman is coordinating refreshments, while Christmas Party Princess Emily Bell is procuring the shrimp tray and assisting in a number of other areas. Kathy DeSantis is in charge of the decor. George Guzik and Rich Bailey are coordinating door prizes with an assist from John Holtz and Pete Zapadka. Tom Reiland is giving a talk on William Herschel and the Herschel List of deep sky objects, and will be giving out hats and patches for star party attendance.

The evening will feature a delicious spread of foods and desserts and (usually) door prizes for everyone! The club purchases a limited amount of food and door prizes to get us started, but the members bring the rest. Where would we be without John Holtz's homemade ice cream? If you don't do homemade, take-out is fine, or bring a bottle of pop!

As for door prizes, consider donating used astronomy-, space-, or science-fiction-related books and DVDs that are still in good condition. Or purchase a book, mug, poster, red-light flashlight or other observing aid. Or surprise us!

All contributions of food and refreshments will be welcome, whether or not you get the opportunity to contact the appropriate coordinator. Bring what you can, bring it all on—the more the merrier!

And if you can't bring something this time, there's always the next. In any case, this party is all about getting members under one roof to celebrate the season and the last year of AAAP activities. The most important contribution you can make is to join us. We want to see YOU there!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, we were unable to get this information in time for the November issue, and because our annual holiday bash is scheduled a week earlier than usual, it's very possible that members who receive the *Guide Star* in the mail won't get this until *after* the party. However, the holiday season does inspire a certain amount of optimism ...and so we are putting this in the December issue in the hopes that it will reach you on time. If you are an online subscriber, please spread the word to other members!

Greetings & Felicitations

Greeting and felicitations to our new November members, joining us just in time for the winter-time festivities.

Welcome! We're happy to have you take part in this year-long Star Party that we call the AAAP!

MIRANDA H. ARELT

ALEXIS NOVAK

VIKAS PAWAR

BILL SNYDER

MARK M. WEBER





Calling for Backup: AAAP Members Virtuosos of Volunteerism

Volunteerism:

The Foundation of Our Activities

By Rich Bailey

The AAAP is always looking for members to help with all we do as an organization. After all, everything done by the club is the result of volunteers. Recently, a couple of specific opportunities have surfaced which present excellent opportunities for people to assist in the continuation of some very worthwhile projects which our club has undertaken over the years.

At present, we are looking for volunteers for two positions that are very different in nature and responsibilities: a Chair for the *Star Cruise Committee*, and a Director for the *AAAP Equipment Loan Program*.

Star Cruise Committee Chair

The *Star Cruise* star party will be at Mingo Creek Park Observatory this time, and will be held from June 23-25th, 2006. As a weekend event, it will be scaled down from the week-long *Star Cruise* we've sponsored in the darker skies of the Laurel Highlands. As a result, we will be taking a fresh look at its possibilities and considering many new ideas. The committee has about dozen members already, many of whom have years of experience planning this event in the past. What is most needed now is a member to coordinate the efforts of the Committee and support staff.

Since *Star Cruise* is a scheduled event, the Chair will have a limited time period for service. The workload may be light early on, but will become more demanding in the spring as the event approaches. By the end of June, the Chair's responsibilities will be done, unless he/she decides to continue on for next year.

Equipment Loan Program Director

Trevor Lewis, the current Director/Caretaker of the AAAP Equipment Loan Program, will be leaving the region early in 2006. We are in the process of looking for a volunteer to assume his duties.

The Director manages and documents the loan of club equipment to members. The position does not require as much activity as many other volunteer positions, but does require adequate space for the storage of equipment and good record-keeping skills. More specifics about the Director's duties will be available in the future.

If you are interested in volunteering for either of these positions, please contact Rich Bailey:
RichBailey@att.net 412.766.3527

Many Thanks to Allegheny Observatory Volunteers

By Louis Cobhan

Out of 315 tickets mailed out this year, 221 people attended the Allegheny Observatory Open House. I would like to thank all who helped out—from those outside in the muggy night air and those standing at the ends of lonely hallways, to those talking for hours on end and those preparing the feast afterwards. A great many thanks!

Suman Bhattacharya	Bruce Howard *	Nicolas Pereyra
David Burkhard	Les Johnson *	Anna Quider
Suchetana Chatterjee	Bob Kalan *	Nancy Robinson
Rose Chavez *	Brenda Keeley	Judith Schomer *
Pat Clevenger	Doc Keeley *	Mark Schomer *
Lou Coban *	Ed Klein *	Dave Smith *
Rupert Croft	Frederick Klein *	Rob Snyder
Kathy DeSantis *	Joe Kline *	John Stein
Tiziana Di Matteo	Kenneth Kobus *	Judy Stein
Bill Donohoe	Brigitte Koenig	Carl Stetar *
Steven Feather	Truman Kohman *	Flaccus Stifel *
Terry Finnegan *	Bob Kramer	Rose Sullivan
George Gatewood	Andrew Mason	Gary Sutton *
Carolyn Gatewood	Cameron McBride	Diane Turnshek *
Jack Greenburg	Susan Michael *	Dave Turnshek
Janet Greenburg	James Moody *	Anja Weyant
Richard Griffiths *	Michael Moody *	George Guzik*
Bill Moutz *	Dave Houggy *	Maureen Moutz *

* Denotes A.A.A.P. membership.

AAAP IT Committee, On the Move

By Rich Bailey

The Information Technology Committee held its first meeting on Friday, November 11th. I suggested forming this committee to consolidate all the high-tech functions members have done in recent years. As the tech industry continues to grow rapidly, it is essential that the AAAP keeps pace and takes advantage of available technologies. I envision this group as a support to the Executive Committee on technical matters. When the Executive Committee makes suggestions on the club IT needs, the IT Committee will review and make recommendations for how to satisfy these needs.

To begin with, I wanted to make this committee as inclusive as possible. That is, to get as many minds as possible together—people who are currently working on these projects, as well as people who have expressed an interest in working in these areas. I came up with 19 people willing to work on this committee. If other people are interested, we would appreciate your input. Below is a listing of committee members who attended the first meeting and committee members who were unable to attend.

Attending:

Craig Lang	Chrissie Chojnicki	Kenn Lippert	Vincent Piccoli
Ken Sacks	Ben Tsai	John Close	Don Hoeche
Greg Alheid	Barbara LaFon	Richard Bailey	

Absent:

Joe Armata	Larry McHenry	Lou Coban
Al Paslow	Judy Maricevic	Mark Schomer
Rowen Poole	Shawn Van Mastrigt	



Don't Miss a Meeting

By Alison Conte

From September to May, the AAAP holds monthly business meetings at 7:30 p.m. on the Friday closest to the full moon. We usually gather at the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh to conduct club business, talk about star gazing and get to know other amateur astronomers.

But many of our club's 500+ members have never been to a meeting and they are missing a great opportunity to enjoy our shared interests. In fact, the AAAP meeting may be the only place in Pittsburgh where you can start a conversation with: "Seen any good occultations lately?"

Meetings are a great time to talk to and learn from other members. If you have a specific question about observing, telescope building, digital imaging, satellite tracking, or any other aspect of amateur astronomy, someone will be glad to point you to someone else who knows the answer.

At meetings, members report on recent observations, and show photos they've taken. You'll learn about programs at our two observatories, star party plans and future astronomical events. You can also pick up information that can be useful to you as an independent observer. We'll even discuss how you can get more involved, help the club, and spread astronomical knowledge.

Most months we invite a scientist, researcher or other professional (sometimes a club member) to speak on astronomy, nature, space exploration, or history...once it was an excursion to Antarctica to gather meteorites. These talks are often accompanied by amazing images.

AAAP meetings are not bogged down in dull parliamentary procedures. Recording Secretary Dennis Derda even makes reading the minutes entertaining. Committee reports are usually brief, but offer details about club activities you might like to get involved in. After meetings some members continue the camaraderie at a local bar or restaurant—a tradition known as quaffing.

Come and be part of it all. Don't miss:

- The 10 minute break that is 20 minutes long
- The mispronounced list of new members
- The suspense of drawing of the 50-50 raffle
- The recitation of obscure astronomical facts

If you like bad jokes, great photos, and a chance to share your observations with others, this is the place to be.

The dates for the 2006 meetings are January 13, February 10, March 10, April 7, and May 12.

Holiday Happenings

IT Committee Issues

The most pressing issues for the IT Committee at this time are Internet service and the process of redesigning and updating the AAAP Website. Committee Chair Craig Lang will submit proposals on these topics to the Executive Committee on Tuesday, November 29th.

Other topics which were discussed at the IT Committee meeting are:

- Web site development
- Listserver options
- Consolidating all related committees
- MCPO computer installation
- Wagman technology issues
- Membership database / Mass mailing labels.
- Donated equipment.
- Two postscript printers from UPMC -Greg Alheid.
- Improving Special Interest Groups (SIGs) communications.

Wagman Combinations

The combinations to the gate lock and security system at Wagman Observatory have been changed. Call Tom Reiland, John Holtz, or Flaccus Stifel for the new numbers.

Just a few reminders:

- 1) To get the gate combination, you must be a current member, with your dues paid.
- 2) To get the codes for the security system, you must have been a member for at least one year, completed training, and have paid your key fee.
- 3) All keyholders should contact either Tom Reiland or Flaccus Stifel before using either of the telescopes at Wagman.

CONGRATULATIONS!

To **Craig Lang**, for being elected to the position of *Chair* to the new *AAAP IT Committee*. You've got your work cut out for you, but we know you'll do a great job.

To **Ann Norman**, for her promotion at work. As a long-time Annotator with the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, our VP has moved up the editorial ladder. She is now the *Production Editor* of the *Journal of Economic Literature*.

Observer's Handbooks— Did You Get Yours?

Merchandiser Rowen Poole has an alarming quantity of 2006 *Observer's Handbooks* in a box in his office. If you ordered one and have forgotten to pick up your copy, he will have them at the Holiday Bash on December 9th. Or if you can't make it, just give him a call.

A Technical Night Before Christmas



'Twas the nocturnal segment of the diurnal period preceding the annual Yuletide celebration, and throughout our place of residence, kinetic activity was not in evidence among the possessors of this potential, including that species of domestic rodent known as *Mus musculus*.

Hosiery was meticulously suspended from the forward edge of the wood burning caloric apparatus, pursuant to our anticipatory pleasure regarding an imminent visitation from an eccentric philanthropist among whose folkloric appellations is the honorific title of St. Nicholas.

The prepubescent siblings, comfortably ensconced in their respective accommodations of repose, were experiencing subconscious visual hallucinations of variegated fruit confections moving rhythmically through their cerebrums.

My conjugal partner and I, attired in our nocturnal head coverings, were about to take slumberous advantage of the hibernal darkness when upon the avenaceous exterior portion of the grounds there ascended such a cacophony of dissonance that I felt compelled to arise with alacrity from my place of repose for the purpose of ascertaining the precise source thereof.

Hastening to the casement, I forthwith opened the barriers sealing this fenestration, noting thereupon that the lunar brilliance without, reflected as it was on the surface of a recent crystalline precipitation, might be said to rival that of the solar meridian itself - thus permitting my incredulous optical sensory organs to behold a miniature airborne runnered conveyance drawn by eight diminutive specimens of the genus *Rangifer*, piloted by a minuscule, aged chauffeur so ebullient and nimble that it became instantly apparent to me that he was indeed our anticipated caller.

With his ungulate motive power traveling at what may possibly have been more vertiginous velocity than patriotic predators, he vociferated loudly, expelled breath musically through contracted labia, and addressed each of the octet by his or her respective cognomen - "Now Dasher, now Dancer..." et al. - guiding them to the uppermost exterior level of our abode, through which structure I could readily distinguish the concatenations of each of the 32 cloven pedal extremities.

As I retracted my cranium from its erstwhile location, and was performing a 180-degree pivot, our distinguished visitant achieved - with utmost celerity and via a downward leap - entry by way of the smoke passage.

Perhaps an oldie, but definitely a goodie...
courtesy of Ann Norman and the Internet.

He was clad entirely in animal pelts soiled by the ebony residue from oxidations of carboniferous fuels which had accumulated on the walls thereof. His resemblance to a street vendor I attributed largely to the plethora of assorted playthings which he bore dorsally in a commodious cloth receptacle.

His orbs were scintillant with reflected luminosity, while his submaxillary dermal indentations gave every evidence of engaging amiability. The capillaries of his malar regions and nasal appurtenance were engorged with blood which suffused the subcutaneous layers, the former approximating the coloration of Albion's floral emblem, the latter that of the *Prunus avium*, or sweet cherry.

His amusing sub- and supralabials resembled nothing so much as a common loop knot, and their ambient hirsute facial adornment appeared like small, tabular and columnar crystals of frozen water.

Clenched firmly between his incisors was a smoking piece whose gray fumes, forming a tenuous ellipse about his occiput, were suggestive of a decorative seasonal circlet of holly. His visage was wider than it was high, and when he waxed audibly mirthful, his corpulent abdominal region undulated in the manner of impectinated fruit syrup in a hemispherical container.

He was, in short, neither more nor less than an obese, jocund, multigenarian gnome, the optical perception of whom rendered me visibly frolicsome despite every effort to refrain from so being. By rapidly lowering and then elevating one eyelid and rotating his head slightly to one side, he indicated that trepidation on my part was groundless.

Without utterance and with dispatch, he commenced filling the aforementioned appended hosiery with various of the aforementioned articles of merchandise extracted from his aforementioned previously dorsally transported cloth receptacle.

Upon completion of this task, he executed an abrupt about-face, placed a single manual digit in lateral juxtaposition to his olfactory organ, inclined his cranium forward in a gesture of leave-taking, and forthwith effected his egress by renegotiating (in reverse) the smoke passage.

He then propelled himself in a short vector onto his conveyance, directed a musical expulsion of air through his contracted oral sphincter to the antlered quadrupeds of burden, and proceeded to soar aloft in a movement hitherto observable chiefly among the seed-bearing portions of a common weed.

But I overheard his parting exclamation, audible immediately prior to his vehiculation beyond the limits of visibility: "Ecstatic Yuletide to the planetary constituency, and to that self same assemblage, my sincerest wishes for a salubriously beneficial and gratifyingly pleasurable period between sunset and dawn!"



A Round of Applause, Please...for the Amazing AAAP Astrophotographers



Amazing Picture Show!

Posted to the AAAP Listserv by Dave Conte

The 2005 Kevin J. Brunelle contest is now history. Yet, the memory of what we saw lingers like the light echo of a super nova. We witnessed a simply awesome show!

Our club has many talented astroimagers in its ranks as evidenced by the 60+ images we were privileged to feast our eyes upon last night.

To all of you who entered; a heartfelt thanks from the K.J.B. committee and the club as a whole. Only those who partake of this magnificent obsession know of the hours committed and skills involved in this peculiar art/science to make an image of the heavens. And sharing our labors with other members is what the contest is all about. Keep up the good work! And to those contemplating taking the plunge, join in! This is truly a very rewarding and worthy pursuit.

Thanks, also, to our benefactors at Sukolsky-Brunelle, Inc. for providing the prizes.

It's less than a year 'till the next contest, so what are you waiting for?

Clear Skies!

Results of the Kevin J. Brunelle Astrophography Contest

A. Astronomical -150 mm or less

First Place, Mark Arelt

"Cygnus"

Second Place Frank Wielgus "Scutum Star Cloud"

Third Place Frank Wielgus "Sagittarius Milky Way"

B. Astronomical - longer than 150 mm

First Place, John Pane

"Andromeda Group of Galaxies"

Second Place Phil Hughes "Mars October 30, 2005"

Third Place Fred Klein "Trifid & Lagoon Nebulae"

C. Atmospheric

First Place, Mark Arelt

"Crepuscular Rays"

Second Place John Pane "Lightning"

Third Place John Pane "Fiery Sunset"

Thanks, Also...

To KJB Astrophography Contest Committee members—Mark Arelt, Dave Conte, and Dave Smith—who volunteered their time and artistic expertise to this year's contest.

Astronomical -150 mm or less

First Place, Mark Arelt: *"Cygnus"*



Astronomical - longer than 150 mm

First Place, John Pane: *"Andromeda Group of Galaxies"*



Atmospheric

First Place, Mark Arelt: *"Crepuscular Rays"*





And Still More, for Your Viewing Pleasure

Okay, we know.

Yes, we did say in the last issue that only the First Place winners of the KJB Astrophotography Contest would be published in the *Guide Star*. Yes, all of these photos are posted on the *Member's* section of the AAAP Website. But *all* of the entries were so impressive...really, just too good to leave out, no matter what we said before. So here they are. Enjoy.

Second Place Winners

Astronomical -150 mm or less
Frank Wielgus "Scutum Star Cloud"



Astronomical - longer than 150 mm
Phil Hughes "Mars October 30, 2005"



Atmospheric
John Pane "Lightning"



Third Place Winners

Astronomical -150 mm or less
Frank Wielgus "Sagittarius Milky Way"








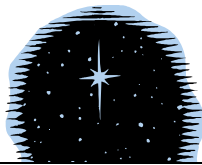



Astronomical - longer than 150 mm
Fred Klein "Trifid & Lagoon Nebulae"



Atmospheric
John Pane "Fiery Sunset"



December 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Holiday Party December 9 th !!				1 	2	3
4	5	6	7	8 	9 AAAP Holiday Party Business Mtg. 7:30 PM Middle Rd. Fire Hall	10
11	12 Geminid Meteors	13 Geminid Meteors	14 Geminid Meteors	15 	16 Snow date for Holiday Party, if needed	17
18 	19	20	21 Winter Solstice 1:35 PM	22 	23 	24
25 Christmas	26 	27	28	29 	30	31

Fridge Calendar by Cathy Rivi

December, 2005

The Guide Star

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Looking ahead: WinterFest is around the corner!!!

Moon Phases based on Eastern Daylight Time.



AAAP Long-Range Meeting Schedule

Jan. 13, 2006 May 12, 2006
 Feb. 10, 2006
 Mar. 10, 2006
 Apr. 7, 2006





*** Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc. ***

Founded June 9, 1929 by Chester B. Roe and Leo J. Scanlon

2005-2006 Executive Officers:

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AAAP Member Dues*:

AAAP Dues:	\$18.00
Junior Member (under 18):	\$13.00
<u>Sky & Telescope</u> Magazine:	Add \$33.00
<u>Astronomy</u> Magazine:	Add \$34.00
<u>Night Sky</u> Magazine:	Add \$18.00

***Basic Procedure for Paying Dues:**

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