

BBAA Meeting Minutes 3/3/2011

The March, 2011 meeting was called to order at 7:31 p.m. by President Mark Gerlach in Room JC12 of TCC, VB campus. (This is the FIRST time we have ever met in the room indicated in the newsletter!) Those in attendance were Neill Alford, Bruce Bodner, Kenny Broun, Scott Bough, Tom Flatley, Courtney Flonta, Ted Forte, Amy Koenig Gardner, Mark Gerlach, Jeff Goldstein, Chuck Jagow, Georgie June, Curt Lambert, Ben Loyola, Matt McLaughlin, Bill McLean, Bill Newman, Jeffrey Nicholson, Bill Powers, George Reynolds, Jim Tallman, and Matt Swingle.

Treasurer's report: General Fund, \$3264.20; Scholarship Fund, \$3700.12; total, \$6964.32.

Secretary's report: 103 total members, of which 10 are associate members (students) and 10 are family memberships. The minutes of the last meeting are published on the BBAA Web site and in the March newsletter.

Scholarship committee report: Ben Loyola said that the scholarship announcement has gone out to all Hampton Roads school districts: Hampton, Newport News, Suffolk, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. The deadline for scholarship application submission is May 1st. He lamented that only the Virginia Beach school system has a good scholarship Web site. The others have a word-of-mouth system that may or may not get results. He said there are dozens of scholarship opportunities, and it is sad that more students do not get the word. In the past we have had very few applicants. There was some discussion that, since the BBAA scholarship fund is above \$3000 now, why not give two scholarships this year. Clarification was made that the Scholarship Committee set the rules last fall, and the announcements have all gone out, so it is too late to change for this year, but when they meet this fall, they can decide to change it. Bill McLean expressed an interest in being on the scholarship committee. Mark mentioned that Dale Carey had also expressed an interest.

Old Business:

VAAS: BBAA is hosting this year's Virginia Association of Astronomical Societies (VAAS) conference. Chuck Jagow, VAAS committee head, reported that the NASA Speakers' Bureau has been contacted. No response has yet been received. Michelle Shinn has a conflict on that date (1 October, 2011) and cannot attend. George "volunteered" Ted Forte and Bruce Bodner to be speakers. An observing site for the night of Saturday, 1 Oct has yet to be determined. Several suggestions were made at the meeting: Cornland, Chippokes, and Northwest River Park.

Dark Sky Site: There was a spirited discussion of a dark sky observing site. The Secretary contacted some interested parties, and solicited more at the meeting. As he said at the Feb. meeting he would, Ken Broun checked the place he had spoken of, with 15 acres in North Carolina. The land is in Tyrell County, North Carolina, about 12 miles south of Columbia, NC, down highway 94, off Gum Neck Road, then Gum Neck Landing, to Grapevine Landing. The spot is near Pettigrew State Park (to the northwest), and Google Earth, projected on the screen at the meeting, showed it to be almost due west

of the dark spot Rob Schonk had found, about five acres near Georgia Road, with the trailer. Ken said the owners had inherited the land, and want to keep it in the family, and are willing to consider a long-term lease to the club (or a consortium of club members).

Ken said it is about an hour and a half from the junction of Ballahack Road and U.S. Route 17. There was once a well and a septic system, which might be re-established. There are tall grass and weeds, small trees and bushes that would need to be cleared. It would be advisable to add a real bathroom, and possibly a shower for extended stays.

An *ad hoc* committee will meet sometime this month, and plan to go on a “field trip” in early April to visit the property and give it careful consideration (after dark). Members who expressed an interest were Mark Gerlach, Ken Broun, Chuck Jagow, Bruce Bodner, Jim Tallman, Bill Newman, Jeff Goldstein, Bill McLean, George Reynolds, and (in absentia) Dale Carey.

New Business:

The RRRT (Rapid Response Robotic Telescope) on Fan Mountain is working, but not all the time. Ted Forte reported that though it is designed to be automated, they prefer that someone be on site when it is in use, “just in case”. The funding for the scope and project was sufficient to build it, but there are no funds for maintenance.

Schedule:

VP Courtney Flonta, BBAA outreach coordinator, reported that there are two outreach sessions next week, Monday, 7 March at Deep Creek Elementary School’s Science Night, and Thursday, 10 March at Portlock Primary School Science Night. There will be a 4-minute pass of the International Space Station Thursday night.

Nightwatch Saturday, Mar. 5

Garden Stars Friday, Mar. 11

Skywatch Friday, Mar. 25

Mount Trashmore Star Party Friday, April 15

Yuri’s Night Saturday, April 16 at Virginia Air and Space Center, Hampton

National Astronomy Day will be Saturday, May 7.

Two events are on tap for June, Field Day at Indian Lakes ES, and Career Day at Tallwood ES. More details will be forthcoming.

Our own Master Observer Ted Forte presented the meeting feature, a very enlightening discussion and slide show of the many “Observing Clubs” available through the Astronomical League. “There is almost something for everybody”, Ted said, with more than 30 “clubs”, opportunities to observe different objects to earn certificates and pins. Ted highlighted a few of the thirty-some lists, starting with the Messier Club. Observers who log 70 Messier objects get the “regular” Messier Certificate, and those who log all 110/109 objects get the “honorary” certificate and a beautiful pin. Other clubs include the Double Star Club, Lunar Club, “Sky Puppy” Club (our own Taylor Christie was the second one in the nation to earn that pin), Herschel 400 Club, Sunspotter’s Club, etc., etc. Something for everyone, even

in light polluted skies. The Urban Club lists 100 objects which MUST be seen in light-polluted urban skies. Double stars, the Moon (Lunar Club and Lunar Club II), the Sun, and the planets can all be seen in light-polluted urban skies.

Several years ago the BBAA voted to host a new Planetary Nebula Club, with Ted as the point man. It became a club project, with many members contributing their time and effort to establish the list of planetary nebula, submit astroimages of various PNs, and create the observing manual. An astronomer must observe 60 of the listed objects to earn the basic certificate, and must log all 110 to get the advanced certificate and pin, which features a lovely color image of M27 the Dumbbell Nebula, photographed by club member Richard Dixon.

Ted emphasized that the biggest advantage of the observing clubs is for stargazers to “see new stuff,” so we’re not looking at the same things over and over. His closing advice: “Get on the Web, read the rules, keep a log, get a certificate.” The A.L Web site may be found at www.astroleague.org.

Observer’s Corner:

Not many observations, thanks to the bad weather we have had, but there was some discussion about the APOD, Astronomy Picture of the Day (<http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/>). Astroimager Ray Gabany spent 30+ hours imaging each of several galaxies, including M81 and NGC 5655, to show faint streams of stars “flowing” off M81 and the Sunflower Galaxy. It is thought that these are remnants of galaxies that have been consumed by and merged with the existing galaxies. Indeed, it has been suggested that the globular star clusters we see in our own Milky Way Galaxy are the remaining cores of ancient galaxies the MW has cannibalized and swallowed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m. by President Mark Gerlach.