



## VBAS Highlights for August

### Public Programs for August

Our member's meeting will be held on Friday, August 18. This month, we'll have a special presentation on *Cosmology and the Hubble Constant*, by Massimiliano Bonamente. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 p.m.; they're open to the public and are free.

Our facilities remodeling is complete and lookin' great, so planetarium programs will officially resume after our Astronomy Day Grand Reopening on September 30. Planetarium programs start at 7:30 pm. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$3.00 for Adults, \$2.00 for Children 6-11, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

### President's Message

Jeff Delmas has a President's Message on page 2.

### Final Open Officer Slot Filled

Eric Peterson has agreed to be our Director of Administration.

### Assorted News Items

Stedtrain needs your help to help the kids. (page 3) A generous person named Anonymous (he gets around!) donated two nice, new vacuum cleaners to VBAS. (page 3) Skylar Call's Eagle Scout project to improve our facilities continues. (page 5) Last but not least, Dr. William Keel gave a talk on Einstein, and got a good look at our telescopes. (page 5)

### VBAS Member Meeting Minutes and Treasurer's Report

Page 6 has the draft minutes of last month's members meeting, followed by the treasurer's report on page 7.

### Astronomy Day Call for Volunteers

There's about 6 weeks before Astronomy Day, so we need volunteers to help plan Astronomy Day activities. If you're interested, please call Melissa Snider at 539-3796, or email her at [MelissaS@SpaceCamp.com](mailto:MelissaS@SpaceCamp.com).

Steve Sloan  
Via Stellaris Editor  
[steve@sloan3d.com](mailto:steve@sloan3d.com)



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**Deadline for September 2006 Via Stellaris submissions is Friday, September 8.**



## President's Message

I've received four inquiries recently on the coming close approach of Mars. What close approach? Right now, Mars is about as far away from Earth as it gets! Why the sudden buzz? It seems that email from last year and three years ago (when Mars truly was very close, but still no closer than 35 million miles away) are now circulating like some recurring viral disease. The old emails are modified to current dates, but the same hoax message about Mars appearing as large as the full Moon survives. Different forms of the email have Mercury or Venus as the planet approaching incredibly close to Earth in a once-in-a-lifetime event. Since your friends and relatives likely know of your interest in Astronomy, be armed with the knowledge that the email message is a hoax and the next close approach of Mars (opposition) will be in late December, 2007. And it will not be a particularly close opposition at about 55 million miles.

For a truly interesting planetary view, try locating Uranus in Aquarius over the next month. It's near Lambda ( $\lambda$ ) Aquarii and moves into opposition September 4 reaching magnitude 5.7 (about the same as Mars currently is). Uranus is a beautiful blue-green planet that few amateur observers seek out – make it an observing goal of yours this fall.

Back here on Earth, I'm very happy to report that great progress was made on the planetarium improvements. VBAS members and volunteers complete painting the walls in late July. Special thanks go to Boy Scout Troop 142, who helped paint on July 29<sup>th</sup>. After the paint was dry, new carpet was laid in early August. All the improvements to the Planetarium, the roof, painting, and carpet, have been funded through the NASA grant originally awarded in May of 2005, then amended in September 2005. The work planned for this summer

is now complete and the planetarium looks great. Come to the members meeting on August 18 and see for yourself!

The planetarium is now ready to be reopened for regular public shows and school programs. To celebrate the improvements, we've scheduled a combined Astronomy Day and Grand Reopening for September 30. Please mark your calendar now and make plans to attend. If you can help work the event, contact Melissa Snider at [education.director1@vbas.org](mailto:education.director1@vbas.org). Look on the VBAS web site for details.

Speaking of events, be sure to set aside October 27 and 28, pack your camping gear, and make plans to attend the third annual Volunteer State Star Party at the Meriwether Lewis Observatory dark sky site (a.k.a. Eric Johnson's place). The past two events have been excellent viewing opportunities and the star party brings in observers from the Nashville and middle Tennessee area as much as from North Alabama. This year's event is sure to be a great one.

Jeff Delmas  
President



*A worker from Kemp's Flooring installs carpet in the Von Braun Planetarium.*

## VBAS Calendar of Events, August through September

Friday, August 18, 2006, 7:30 PM

### Regular Monthly Meeting: Cosmology and the Hubble Constant

Cosmology is the scientific study of the large scale properties of the Universe as a whole, and it endeavors to use scientific methods to understand the origin, evolution, and ultimate fate of the entire Universe. Part of this study involves observational testing of the Big Bang theory, which attempts to explain the expansion of the Universe using a Cosmological Constant and the Hubble Law.

We're excited to have Massimiliano Bonamente, Assistant Research Professor at UAH's Physics Department and NSSTC, as our guest speaker for this month's Members' Meeting. He will be speaking about the history of the Hubble constant, and his recent involvement in NASA's project using the Chandra X-ray Observatory to independently determine the expansion rate of the Universe, the so-called Hubble constant.

Please remember to invite your friends to enjoy both the program and viewing afterwards, weather permitting, and help spread the word about this year's Astronomy Day on Saturday, September 30th!

Friday, September 15, 2006, 7:30 PM

### Regular Monthly Meeting

Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

Saturday, September 30, 2006, 7:30 PM

### Astronomy Day

Astronomy Day is coming up soon, so we really need more volunteers! If you're interested, please call Melissa Snider at 539-3796, or email her at [MelissaS@SpaceCamp.com](mailto:MelissaS@SpaceCamp.com).

October 16-22, 2006

### PSSG '06 (13th Annual Peach State Star Gaze)

*Whitewater Express High Adventure Camp, Copperhill, TN near the Georgia State Line*

Check here for more information next month! <http://www.atlantaastronomy.org/PSSG/>

...And as always, for the most up-to-date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at <http://vbas.org/events.cfm>.

## Stedtrain Needs You

*by Evelyn Sabino*

The Stedtrain Committee of HATS (Huntsville Association of Technical Societies, of which VBAS is a charter member) needs help to complete its mission. Stedtrain solicits science- and technology-based proposals from local K-12 teachers, evaluates them, and then raises the money to fund them. Without the equipment, software, and project materials supplied by these grants, many of our students would have small exposure to the

wonders of the natural world. Stedtrain then monitors the progress of these projects. This committee has provided a much needed boost to education in this area for seventeen years and now finds itself in need of help with the mechanics of its work. Please volunteer. Stedtrain meets the first Tuesday of every month at DMS Technology, Inc., 2905 Westcorp Blvd. Suite 220, Huntsville, AL 35805. 256.536.4346.

## We Have New Vacuum Cleaners!

*by Gena Crook*

VBAS would like to sincerely thank an anonymous donor for this generous gift. We have received a brand new Bissell upright vacuum for large jobs AND a brand new Bissell Featherweight for small jobs. A 50-foot heavy-duty extension cord was also in the package –

that will come in handy in lots of places! Coupled with our new carpet in the planetarium purchased with the NASA grant money, it has been just like Christmas in the summer. THANKS.

## The Night Sky for August, 2006

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid August, 2006, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Mars, the shield-and-spear symbol, will be near Leo. Jupiter, the curly "4" symbol, will be big and bright between Libra and Virgo.

The best meteor shower of most years is the Perseid shower peaking on August 12, which is just after full moon this year. This meteor stream is debris from the comet Swift-Tuttle, and the radiant (Perseus) rises not long after dark. Meteors from this shower should be prominent from August 7 'til August 17 even though the sharp peak will be spoiled by the full moon this year.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>). Meteor information by Wesley Swift.



## Skylar Call's Eagle Project Work Day

by John Young

Our prospective Eagle Scout from Troop 376, Skylar Call, came up with approximately 20 folks including friends from Randolph School and parents.

They arrived at 5 p.m. and left at 8:30 p.m. They got a lot done. They cut back and cleaned up the brush line along the perimeter of the observing field, pressure-sprayed the Swanson exterior, rejuvenated a few mulch beds

(new mulch and trim), and added two mulch beds. Very noticeable and attractive improvements in just a few hours!

He/they will be returning on August 12th to finish the beds up and do some painting and patch work on the walls.



## Dr. William Keel's Tour

After Dr. William Keel gave his presentation on *Living in Einstein's Universe*, he took a tour of our facilities, and talked to the VBAS members who attended.



*Dr. Keel thrusts his head into the lion's mouth, as he inspects the Angele 21 inch telescope.*



*Dr. Keel (on the left) gives the C-16 a test run with (L to R) Wesley Swift, Tim Perry (long time no see!), and Andy Wilson.*



*Dr. Keel poses for a group picture with everybody who attended his talk.*

## **VBAS Draft Member Meeting Minutes**

*VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM on Wed July 21, 2006*

by Steve Sloan

Jeff Delmas announced that we have an open position, the Director of Administration.

Linda Farnell announced new members: Jim Shurling (Life), Sammie Davis (Family), John Dimmock (Family). We also had renewals: Mike Welch, Mark and Susan Smith, and Tim and Debra Palmer.

Gena gave a Treasurer's Report. [See page 7.] Expenses were pretty normal. Income included two shows for the Space and Rocket Center.

### **Committee Reports:**

Facilities Director John Young discussed Skylar Call's Eagle Scout project. His next task is quarter-round beautification. It's projected to end in August.

Gena announced that we would start painting the vertical walls of the planetarium starting at 9 am the next day. The second coat was planned for the following weekend. The week after that, the carpet would be ripped out. The new carpet arrives on August 7.

Melissa is working to form an Astronomy Day Planning Committee.

Jeff asked if anyone has an old vacuum, because we need one donated. We would prefer bag-less. [An anonymous donor has since taken care of that. See page 3.]

Evelyn Sabino discussed Stedtrain, a committee of HATS (Huntsville Association of Technical Societies). Stedtrain accepts proposals from K-12 teachers for science projects that aren't funded by their schools. Stedtrain gets them funded. The organization wants help publicizing, evaluating proposals, following through with teachers, and running presentations at the end of the year. She suggested that VBAS appoint an official representative. Jeff offered VBAS facilities and equipment for in-kind trade. Evelyn Sabino will write up the information about the group and their needs, and include it in the newsletter. [Done, see page 3.]

Meeting Adjourned

After the meeting, Michael Cowger delivered a presentation on *VBAS and Sidewalk Astronomy*.

9:57 AM 08/09/06 Accrual Basis		<b>Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc. Profit &amp; Loss July 2006</b>	
	<u>TOTAL</u>		
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>			
<b>Income</b>			
donation /chairs	50.00		
donation /aquarium	35.00		
Food sales	1.00		
Gift Shop Sales	10.00		
Membership Dues	649.00		
USSRC Program Fees	<u>500.00</u>		
<b>Total Income</b>	<b><u>1,245.00</u></b>		
<b>Gross Profit</b>	1,245.00		
<b>Expense</b>			
Buildings Maintenance	305.26		
Food expense	12.70		
GRANT expenditure	1,544.15 *	* 359.93	school buses
Newsletter	115.56	1000.00	carpet downpayment
Observatory Maintenance	2.42	35.00	asbestos test
Planetarium Maintenance	97.32	149.22	planetarium paint and equip.
Postage	1.50		
Supplies	69.72		
Telephone	42.81		
USSRC Presenter	20.00	replacement check written for Doshia	
Website	<u>26.95</u>		
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b><u>2,238.39</u></b>		
<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<b><u>-993.39</u></b>		
<b>Net Income</b>	<b><u><u>-993.39</u></u></b>		
beginning bank balance	\$65,711.22	ending bank balance	\$64,717.83
ending bank balance	\$64,717.83	Grant money remaining	\$52,641.08
difference	-\$993.39	difference	\$11,525.99
certificate of deposit	\$5,000.00		

### Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Steve Sloan at [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org). If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Villaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

### Check Your Label

Look at the address label on the outside of your *Via Stellaris*. The first line contains the expiration date on the right-hand side. Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society. If your mailing address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary, Linda Farnell, at 534-5060, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

### Membership Dues Reminder

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership and the dues for each are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year.

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