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VBAS Calendar of Events

Thursday, April 2nd, 2009 7:30-10 PM

Friday, April 3rd, 2009 7:30-10 PM

Saturday, April 4th, 2009 7:30-10 PM

100 Hours of Astronomy

Location: Bridge Street Town Centre

VBAS Members will be talking with the public about the exciting hobby of astronomy and letting them view the night skies through our telescopes at Bridge Street Town Centre as part of a world-wide star party!

The International Astronomical Union (IAU) has declared 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) with the theme "The Universe, yours to discover". IYA2009 marks the 400th anniversary of Galileo Galilei's first astronomical observation through a telescope. IYA2009 will be a global celebration of astronomy and its contribution to society and culture. It will have a strong emphasis on education, public engagement and the involvement of young people. Events will be organised at global, national and regional levels throughout 2009. IYA2009 has been endorsed by UNESCO and the UN General Assembly.

The International Year of Astronomy 2009 is supported by eleven cornerstone projects and seven special projects established by the IAU Executive Committee IYA2009 Working Group. These global programmes are based on specific themes that collectively represent the means to achieve IYA2009's primary goals. The projects and the global participation they will generate are the key to the success of IYA2009.

The 100 Hours of Astronomy Cornerstone Project (100HA) is an around-the-clock, worldwide event with 100 continuous hours of a wide range of activities and public outreach events, including live webcasts, observing events, star parties and other specialised activities. One of the key goals of 100HA is to have as many people as possible look through a telescope as Galileo did for the first time 400 years ago. 100HA will start officially at midnight

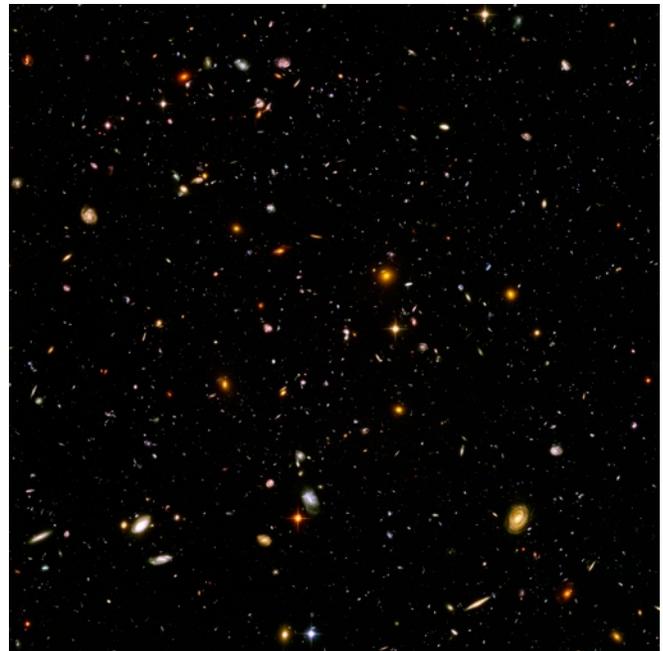
the night of 2/3 April at the International Dateline (12.00UT). It is a four-day event designed to bring astronomy to the public around the world. This doesn't mean any one group is expected to take part for the entire 100 hours. Whether it's a few hours on one day or a 100-hour marathon event, how groups choose to participate is up to them. Plans should fit the resources and enthusiasm that's available. All activities and events during 100HA will bring astronomy to a new audience. For additional details, visit www.100hoursofastronomy.org

Saturday, April 4th, 11th, & 25th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Galaxies and the Distant Universe

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family-friendly program as we explain how and where over 3,000 new galaxies have recently been discovered thanks to Hubble Deep Field images. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes, too.



The Hubble Deep Field (HDF) is an image of a small region in the constellation Ursa Major. Almost all of the 3,000 objects in the image are galaxies, some of which are among the youngest and most distant known.

Friday, April 17th, 2009, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program.

Saturday, April 18th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Seasonal Star Tour

Location: VBAS

Join us for a relaxing evening at VBAS. We'll show you which constellations are visible this time of year, and teach you how to find them. We'll also learn about the fascinating and beautiful deep sky objects that can be found, along with a mix of mythology. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes, too.

Friday, April 24th, 2009, 7 PM - 9 PM

Youth Astronomy Evening

Location: VBAS

Presented by David Lofts

Doug Horacek will provide dark sky information and David will have a lesson in the planetarium before the kids go out and observe. This will be the same evening as the Messier Marathon, and the kids are welcome to look through willing adults' scopes. The youth are welcome to stay after the youth event to view various objects if they choose. I am sure the adult observers will be glad to share the views through their telescopes. Call Chris Lofts at 256-726-0275 or Doug Horacek at 256-772-6788 for more information.

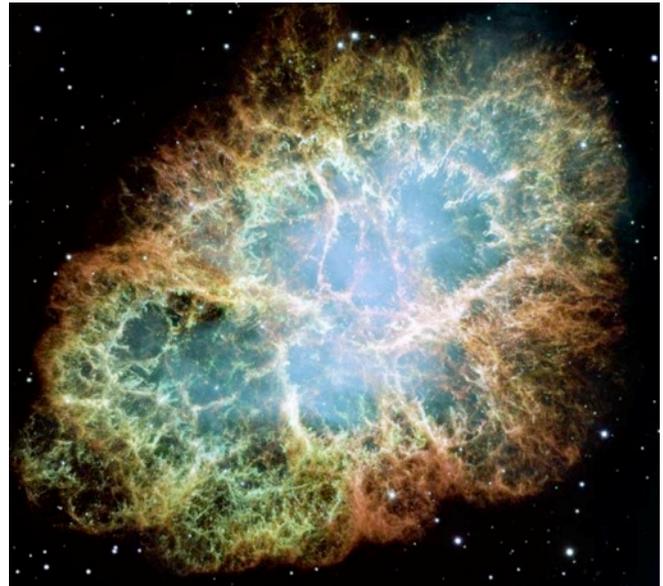
Friday, April 24th, 2008

(Rain date Saturday, April 25th)

Messier Marathon

Location: VBAS

"Messier Marathon" is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. Because last month's original date was clouded over, this year's Messier marathon has been rescheduled for Friday, April 24. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer observers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.



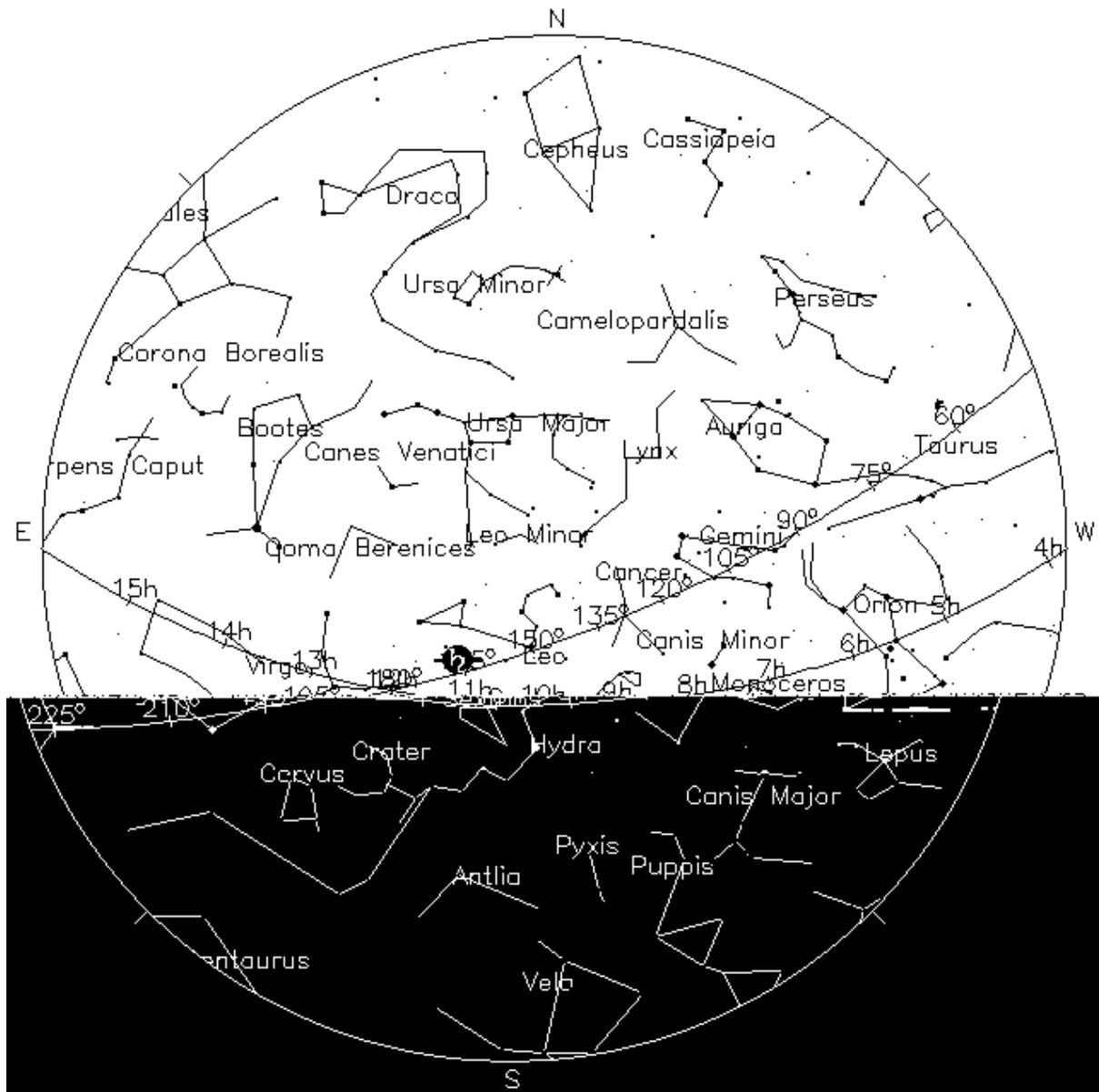
The Crab Nebula is cataloged as M1, the first object on Charles Messier's famous list of things that are not comets. (Image Credit: [NASA](#), [ESA](#), J. Hester, A. Loll)

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

The Night Sky for April, 2009

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid April, 2009, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Jupiter (the lowercase “h” symbol) will be high in the sky, near Leo.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



Events in the April Skies & Evenings to See Titan Pass Saturn's Globe

by Doug Horacek, Resident Astronomer

If you are visiting areas north and west of Huntsville on the morning of 22 April 2009, the moon will occult Venus (see *Sky and Telescope* for details); however, the event will not be visible from North Alabama. That morning the Lyrid meteor shower will be visible along with some meteors that may come from the south part of the Pi Puppis meteor shower, whose peak is the next morning. The radiant point for the Lyrid shower is Vega, the constellation's brightest star. The radiant point for Pi Puppis is Pi Puppis. The comet associated with the Lyrids is comet Thatcher or C/1861 G1. The comet associated with Pi Puppis is comet 26P/Grigg-Skjellerup. The moon will be a thin

crescent, so if you choose to get up early you might see some meteor action.

Titan will pass in front of Saturn's globe, casting its shadow on the planet at reasonable hours on the evenings of Saturday, 30 May and Monday, 15 June. This happens at 11:30 and 10:30 PM CDT, respectively. Unfortunately, Saturn will be too low in the western sky for our C16. See *Sky and Telescope* for more details and evenings you may wish to stay up late and see the transits. In all cases Saturn will be low in the Western Sky when these transits occur. You might want to keep this month's issue of *Sky and Telescope* for this information.

Calling All Members ... Well, At Least One

by John Young

We're looking for someone to step up and take a lead role on the board as the VBAS membership secretary.

Most know that the membership secretary is the first contact potential our new members have with our group, so it's important to fill this position with someone who has some good people skills and a few hours each week to give to the cause.

Serving on a board is a great way to get your volunteer feet wet by meeting new peo-

ple, learning new skills, and giving to the team. I ask everyone to please give it due consideration and feel free to call or email if you have questions about the duties of the position.

Clear skies and warm regards...

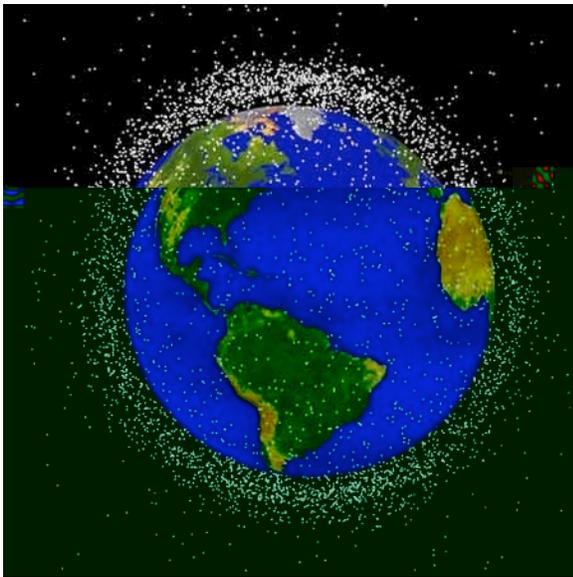
John Young
VBAS President
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The Student's Corner

Space Junk: A Growing Problem

by David Lofts

How many times have you heard your mom say, "Go clean your room"? If big heaping piles of junk clogged your room, your mom might have a fit about it and the health department might condemn the house. Because of all of the stuff we have launched into space, the sky around Earth is littered with satellites that don't work, spent rocket stages, and a wide variety of debris. This junk can range from the size of a car to tiny flecks of paint as small as a grain of sand. Maybe somebody (probably somebody's mom) will have a fit about it and find someone to clean it all up in a timely manner.



Space Junk Around Earth
(news.nationalgeographic.com)

In space, a fleck of paint the size of a few grains of sand can punch a hole in a piece of glass one inch thick. The most recent collision on February 19, 2009 of an Iridium commercial satellite and an inactive Russian satellite flung thousands of particles streaming over thousands of cubic miles. A week later, the International Space Station came threateningly close to colliding with a piece of space junk. Had the debris

hit the space station, it would have caused a fatal loss of air pressure. If most of this space debris is not cleaned up, the risk of satellites being hit with space junk will become increasingly higher and space travel will become more hazardous.

Some ideas for removing the space junk include spraying it with old, water-loaded rockets so that the debris will be nudged towards the earth and burn up in the atmosphere, or using the space shuttle to haul it back down. Adding thrusters to satellites to push them toward the earth near the end of their lifespan would be helpful because then nobody would have to retrieve them. Some unrealistic ideas include using low power lasers to blast space junk to smithereens, which creates smaller and more hazardous particles of space junk. Because satellites have very little iron in them, using a magnet to collect space junk is also unrealistic. Spreading large nets to trap debris probably wouldn't work because the nets would have to extend for miles to catch anything.

Perhaps we need to treat space more like a national park by taking down most of the junk that we launch up. In any case, the orbital space around the earth could use some cleaning. If you clean your room, your mom will be happier, and if space is cleaned, everybody will be happier.

It's Time to Renew Your Membership

by Sara Neale

On March 1, all VBAS memberships expired. Those who wish to remain members will need to renew their memberships. Not a member? Then become one! It's so easy and much cheaper in the long run, especially if you often find yourself at our local planetarium and observatory on the weekends! To become a member or renew your membership:

- Go to www.vbas.org,
 - Click the "About Us" tab
 - Click "Join VBAS."
 - Fill out the application and send a check to the VBAS address below.
- Or, simply talk to a friendly staff member after a show one night. They can walk you through the membership process.

Payment can be either given to the ticket-taker or a VBAS officer at shows, or snail mailed to:

VBAS Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 1142
Huntsville, AL 35807

Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society.

As an all volunteer organization, VBAS counts on your dues and donations to keep running. You truly make a difference in the society, and we try to give that back to the community so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of astronomy. Thanks so much!

2009 Messier Marathon Set for April 24

by Jeff Delmas

"Messier Marathon" is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. This is possible during several times of the year, but all 110 objects are most accessible to viewers in the Spring months of March and April during or near new Moons.

This year's Messier Marathon has been set for Friday, April 24. This year, timing is almost ideal, with the new Moon occurring the same night as our marathon on April 25 at 03:23 UT. Saturday, April 25 is the rain date for the marathon. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer observers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.

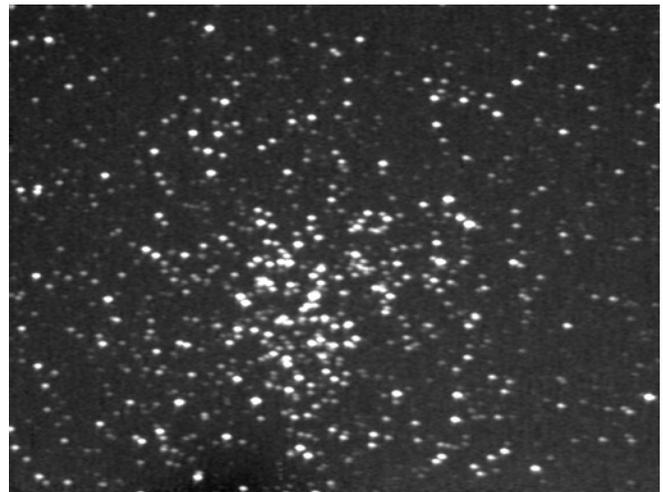


Photo of M37 by Jeff Delmas.

VBAS Member Meeting Minutes

7:30 PM on Friday, January 16, 2009

At 7:33, President John Young called the business meeting to order. The first order of business was approval of November's member meeting minutes. There was one item that needed amending, dealing with the Stuhlinger scholarship fund. Jeff moved that we approve the November 2008 member minutes as amended, Terry seconded, and the motion carried.

Introductions were made around the room, and new members were introduced.

Doug reminded us that January 22 will be our only chance to see two planets close together in the evening hours this year. Uranus and Venus will be only 1.2° apart, and he will show where during tomorrow night's planetarium show, which he encouraged us to attend.

Next month's planetarium shows will be centered on Galileo.

We need to form a nominating committee in the next month or so. Anyone interested, please get involved in the nominating committee or even in officer positions.

2009 is the International Year of Astronomy.

We'll be holding an observer-centric event in the March time frame. James Brelsford will post about it in the newsletter.

Jeff proposed March 27 for this year's VBAS Messier Marathon.

Jeff just received a big box of motors to replace the ones that turn the Swanson dome. We'll also need to level and smooth the rail the dome rides on.

We'll be giving our winter skies planetarium show tomorrow. Doug will focus on Gemini, the winter pentagon, and the winter triangle.

Terry is waiting on an estimate to resurface the roof near the C16. She'll also need to restucco another part of the facilities. Should she purchase a new insulated door for the C16 enclosure?

Jared is planning the next few months of members meeting programming. We need to clean out various stuff to sell at a future members meeting. Members are welcome to bring their own stuff to sell, as well. It will be like a rummage or yard sale. Should we invite the Makers to the sale? They're a local techie group with members in their 20s to 30s who makes stuff. Our own Sara Neale is a member.

Jared is still trying to nail down next month's program.

Sam suggested that because 2009 is the Alabama Year of History, we should do a historical program about VBAS.

The business meeting ended at 7:54 PM. After the business meeting, Wesley Swift presented a program about telescope optics and math.

VBAS Member Meeting Minutes

7:30 PM on Friday, February 20, 2009

At 7:33, Vice President Jared Cassidy called the business meeting to order. He started with introductions. We welcomed several visitors from the Shoals Astronomy Club.

The first order of business was approving the minutes, but no one brought a copy to approve.

There was no old business, so we started with committee reports.

Jeff Delmas' team of volunteers met to work on the Swanson. The dome motors are out, so they are working on replacing them. They'll be done this weekend. Next weekend, they'll be cutting trees down and working on the dome. Any additional help would be welcome.

Jeff reminded us that the Messier Marathon will be March 27. Everyone is invited, es-

pecially those with telescopes. Tuesday, Jeff recorded a promo spot for the Messier Marathon to be aired on WLRH.

As for fundraising, Jeff is still looking for sponsors. Wes Colley suggested that the National Science Foundation budget has extra money from the bailout that they're wanting to spend.

Terry Owens reported as Director of Facilities. She is refurbishing the Angele rooftop, stripping off the old paint and putting in newer crystal treatment. The exact product name is Krystol T1 and T2. She's planning to put a French drain system under the slab. At the upcoming tree cutting party, they have one chainsaw available, and they could use a second chainsaw, along with more hands helping.

Tom Burleson reported on the first meeting of the audit committee. They discussed processes and procedures. They recommend that VBAS should keep two sets of electronic data, one with the treasurer, and one on a thumb drive at the VBAS facilities as backup.

Resident Astronomer Doug Horacek reminded us that next Friday will be a youth observing night. There will also be a youth

VBAS Board Meeting Minutes

7 PM on Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Attendees:

Gena Crook, Jared Cassidy, Doug Horacek, Terry Owens, Steve Sloan, Melissa Snider, John Young, Roy Young by telephone

The meeting was called to order by President John Young at 7:11 p.m.

Doug reminded us of the youth observing event Friday night. The adult event will be February 20th, and the youth observing night focused on Orion will be the 27th. Doug wants to hold a Pleiades occultation observing event December 29, 2009.

Terry moved that we approve the December 2nd board meeting minutes, Melissa seconded, and the motion carried.

Gena presented the Treasurer's Report. Gena checked Sara's accounting work for the first six months of the fiscal year, and everything jibed. Gena will take any recommendations about different ways to handle the spreadsheets. **Melissa moved that we accept the Treasurer's Report as is for July through December, 2008. Terry seconded, and the motion carried.**

Facilities addition fundraising was discussed. Since our last meeting, John asked a friend at COLSA who to ask about donations, and he found out that now is a good time for COLSA.

There has been some activity on the member survey, including an effort to shrink it to one page, front and back. We'd like to send it out with the annual renewal notice, possibly in the form of a newsletter with articles from the Via Stellaris. Steve should give it to Melissa to print. Cost for the member survey should come out of the Postage and Printing budget line items, not the newsletter.

The Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce is holding a new member lunch on February 12, from 1130 AM to 1 PM, which is free to attend. Seven VBAS people have signed up so far.

Astronomical League roster is late this time for the first quarter 2009 deadline.

Roy discussed Walker County's A3P planetarium projector by teleconference. His last conversation with them was at the end of December. Walker County will make a decision about what they want to do with the A3P in the March timeframe. They're waiting to see if they can assemble one working projector from two that they have, before they decide to give up the A3P. Both projectors worked the last time they tried them. We will probably be installing the A3P here around August. Back in early December, John sent a letter reminding Walker County of our interest in the A3P.

Gena discussed the VBAS audit. She currently has Dennis Weldy, Skeet Vaughan, and Tom Burleson, Jr. to help. She tried to conduct an audit two years ago, but it didn't work out, so VBAS has never had an audit before. It would be good to get it done before the end of the fiscal year.

Melissa reported no new progress on the partnership with Huntsville Public Library. It's a bigger project than she's comfortable with taking on. Instead of helping them buy and set up a large telescope, we should start smaller, building a relationship with them by doing sidewalk astronomy. We'll drop the large-scale partnership from our to-do list.

John reported no progress on the Hayes Nature Preserve memorandum of understanding.

The VBAS Stuhlinger donation has all but two pledges paid up. There's a good chance Mrs. Stuhlinger may donate his scope to us. We could possibly loan it out to a young male observer to use in a project, in the same way we currently loan out the Ann Sanford telescope to young female observers.

According to Doug, the Observatory Committee pitched in to work on leveling the dome, so smaller motors can do the job of rotating it.

Gena is working on the 2009-2010 budget, which is due at the May members meeting.

Our IRS filing is coming up. Sara filed the first VBAS electronic tax return last time, and it was easy. The next one is due in July.

According to Terry, the Angele and Swanson still have water leakage. She has already caulked a big crack in the stucco. She scheduled an estimate from a stucco contractor, who also wants to bring along a roofing contractor. They're waiting on a good rain, so they can see how bad it is. Terry will be getting estimates for both roof and stucco repair, to be split into two separate estimates. Also, the C16 door is warped, and Terry wants to replace it.

Jared reminded us that we need to select a Nominating Committee for 2009. The board is supposed to select two board members to serve, and the membership is supposed to select three regular members. Doug volunteered as a regular member. We should already have a standing committee. Terry volunteered, as did Jared, giving us our two elected officers. **Melissa moved that Jared and Terry serve on the nominating committee. Gena seconded, and the motion carried.**

We decided to postpone discussion of member dues renewal until Gerry Conrad can participate.

John, Jared, and Ethan met Sunday to discuss website action items. They went over all feedback. They still need to compile a list and prioritize items.

Melissa led discussion about our recurring involvement in the ASEF science fair. Astronomy projects are rare nowadays, so they should be encouraged. Wes has handed out an astronomy prize before, and it would be good for us to continue to do that. Prize ideas were discussed. The money for it would come out of the \$100 Awards line item in the budget. We ultimately decided to award a t-shirt, certificate, and VBAS membership to each prize winner. We want to do it as regularly as we can.

We need to put together certificates of appreciation for retiring board members. This is

just a casual mention to remind us. The money comes out of the Awards budget.

New planetarium presenter trainee J. C. Carpenter is a member of a club at UAH. He would like to have a club event at our facilities, with a planetarium show and barbeque. The consensus was that we approve.

John moved to adjourn, and Terry seconded. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m. The next board meeting will be Tuesday, February 24th.

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. If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Vilaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

Membership and Renewal

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. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships came up for renewal on March 1, 2009. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact a VBAS officer.

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 or email address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor