



# VBAS Highlights for September

## Public Programs for September

Our member's meeting was held on Friday, September 15, and the minutes will appear in the October *Via Stellaris*. In September, Dr. Phil Stahl, from NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, gave a special presentation on the James Webb Space Telescope.

At our next Member's Meeting on Friday, October 20th at 7:30 pm, Walt Langley will present a program on "Hallo Northern Sky", a free planetarium software package for Microsoft Windows capable of controlling "go-to" telescopes, and utilizing the SAO, PPM, and Tycho-2 Star databases.

Walt will have his laptop setup along with his telescope to show us how easy it is to use as well as the sophisticated graphics and database algorithms. It comes with over 26000 deep sky objects and all stars to magnitude 12!

Remember to invite your friends and join us at VBAS for the 7:30 Members' Meeting followed by viewing of the night sky afterwards. 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 discusses Astronomy Day, the Volunteer State Star Party, and the status of Pluto on page 2.

## Eagle Scout Project Update

Skylar Call finished his Eagle Scout project to improve our facilities. Go to page 5 for an update and pictures.

## Telescope For Sale

T. L. Ingram is selling a ten inch reflector. See page 5 for details.

## VBAS Member Meeting Minutes and Treasurer's Report

Page 6 has the draft minutes of last month's members meeting and the Treasurer's report.

## Astronomy Day!

Astronomy Day is just a few days away! Please make plans to be there on September 30 and bring all of your friends! Admission is free for all, and the festivities will have something for every age and interest level. Schedule, and an update on Astronomy Day committee activities, inside on page 7.

We still need your help! See page 7 for ways to help out, then contact Melissa Snider at 539-3796 or [melissas@spacecamp.com](mailto:melissas@spacecamp.com).

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

**Deadline for October 2006 Via Stellaris submissions is Friday, October 6.**



*In This Issue:*

- VBAS Highlights for September..... 1
- President's Message..... 2
- Calendar of Events..... 3
- The Night Sky for September. 4
- Eagle Scout Project Update..... 5
- Telescope For Sale..... 5
- VBAS Member Meeting Minutes.....6
- Treasurer's Report..... 6
- Astronomy Day Committee Report.....7



## President's Message

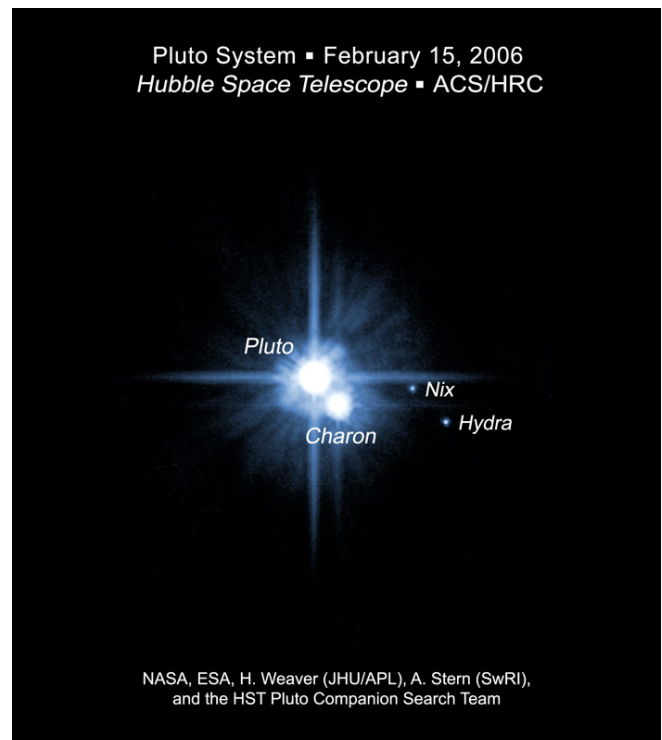
Fall is moving in fast and with it comes one of the best observing seasons of the year. The air gets drier and clearer, the Sun sets earlier, and the temperature is cool yet much more tolerable than winter's chill. This Fall is also the season for new beginnings here at VBAS. We're celebrating the reopening of the planetarium after being closed during the summer for renovations. The improvements to the planetarium made over the summer are numerous: new roof, new carpet, fresh paint, and new audio and video equipment. The official reopening will be held at 1:00 PM September 30 as part of the Astronomy Day activities. Please read more about Astronomy Day in Melissa Snider article on page 7. We'll also review Astronomy Day plans at the members meeting on September 15. Special thanks go to Eagle Scout candidate Skylar Call and his crew on the tremendous job they did improving the grounds and putting a fresh coat of paint on the exterior of the buildings. See John Young's article on page 5 for more information.

Once again, I want to remind everyone about the Volunteer State Star Party at the Meriwether Lewis Observatory dark sky site (a.k.a. Eric Johnson's place). The weekend-long event is set for October 27 and 28. Pack your camping gear, and make plans to be there. There is no charge to attend and Eric provides a great dinner and breakfast. Although he doesn't ask for help, please consider bringing a dish to share with others. Contact Eric at [ejohnso4@yahoo.com](mailto:ejohnso4@yahoo.com) by October 20 to let him know if you plan to attend. This is a great way to learn the night sky in a short time!

I suppose I should say something about Pluto – everyone from Stephen Hawking to Jay Leno has had something to say about its expulsion from the club of planets. Is it a wise decision? I think so. Pluto has always been the

odd planet out. It's usually the ninth planet from the Sun, but sometimes the eighth. Its orbit is inclined significantly from the equatorial plane of the Sun, making it different from the other eight. Surely its formation was due to different forces than those forming the other planets. Because it's so different and because it now seems to be more akin to even further distant objects orbiting the Sun, the decision seems to be sound. But it's going to take some time to get used to saying "the eight planets and the three or four dwarf planets". In the end, the "demotion" doesn't mean very much. Pluto is unchanged by the classification system of humans on Earth. It is what it is and our naming system doesn't change that. And I want the inhabitants of Pluto to know that we don't think any less of them at all just because they live on a dwarf planet!

Jeff Delmas



## VBAS Calendar of Events, September through October

*Friday, September 15, 2006, 7:30 PM*

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

Dr. Phil Stahl, from NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, will give a special presentation on the James Webb Space Telescope. Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

*Saturday, September 23, 2006, 10 AM-5 PM*

### **Facilities Working Party**

In preparation for Astronomy Day and the Re-Opening of the Planetarium, a Facilities Working Party is scheduled for Saturday, September 23rd from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Projected tasks include grounds maintenance, minor painting, and a general tidying up of the facilities. Any help you can provide to make VBAS look its best for this special event is appreciated. Please contact John at 464-7998 or email [jgy71@bellsouth.net](mailto:jgy71@bellsouth.net) if you can make it.

*Saturday, September 30, 2006, 9 AM-1 PM, and 7 PM to about 10 PM*

### **Astronomy Day & Planetarium Grand Re-Opening**

Come see the newly refurbished planetarium! Family Activities and Planetarium Tours: 9 AM - 1 PM. Guest Speakers and a special planetarium show start at 7 PM. See page 7 for more details.

*Saturday, October 14, 2006, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: *Sailing the Photon Sea***

*Presented by Roy Young*

Getting around in space is tough. Once in orbit it takes lots of fuel to send a space ship to other parts of the solar system. Imagine if you could travel without fuel just by using light. Join VBAS Planetarium Director Roy Young as we explore the many uses of solar sails, large, light weight sheets that reflect sunlight to provide propulsion.

*October 16-22, 2006*

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

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

Dark skies and fall mountain views. Keynote speaker, Bob Berman of Astronomy and Discover mags. Vendors, workshops and door prizes. Jonn Serrie, back again for the second year, will entertain us Friday night with music from "Stargazer's Journey". Daytime adventures can be booked through the Whitewater Express offices. Plenty of other daytime excursions available in the surrounding mountain communities. Check our website for more information. Sponsored by the Atlanta Astronomy Club.

Website: <http://www.atlantaastronomy.org/PSSG/>

Email: [PSSG@AtlantaAstronomy.org](mailto:PSSG@AtlantaAstronomy.org)

*Friday, October 20, 2006, 7:30 PM*

### **Regular Monthly Meeting and "Hallo Northern Sky" Presentation**

Walt Langley will present a program on "Hallo Northern Sky", a free planetarium software package for Microsoft Windows capable of controlling "go-to" telescopes, and utilizing the SAO, PPM, and Tycho-2 Star databases.

*Saturday, October 21, 2006, 7:30 PM*

### **Children's Show: *Are There Other Worlds Out There?***

*Presented by Gena Crook & Sara Neale*

*Friday October 27 - Saturday October 28, 2006*

### **Third Annual Volunteer State Star Party**

*Location: Meriwether Lewis Observatory Dark Sky Site, in Tennessee*

*Presented by Eric Johnson.*

Check back for more details as the time approaches!

*Saturday, October 28, 2006, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: *Quasars and Black Holes and Comets, Oh, My!***

It's fun to be scared by pretend things at this time of year. Come to the Planetarium and learn about REAL things to be scared of! Join professional educator *Beth Bero* as we discover a universe of scary and impressively dangerous objects.

...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> .

## The Night Sky for September, 2006

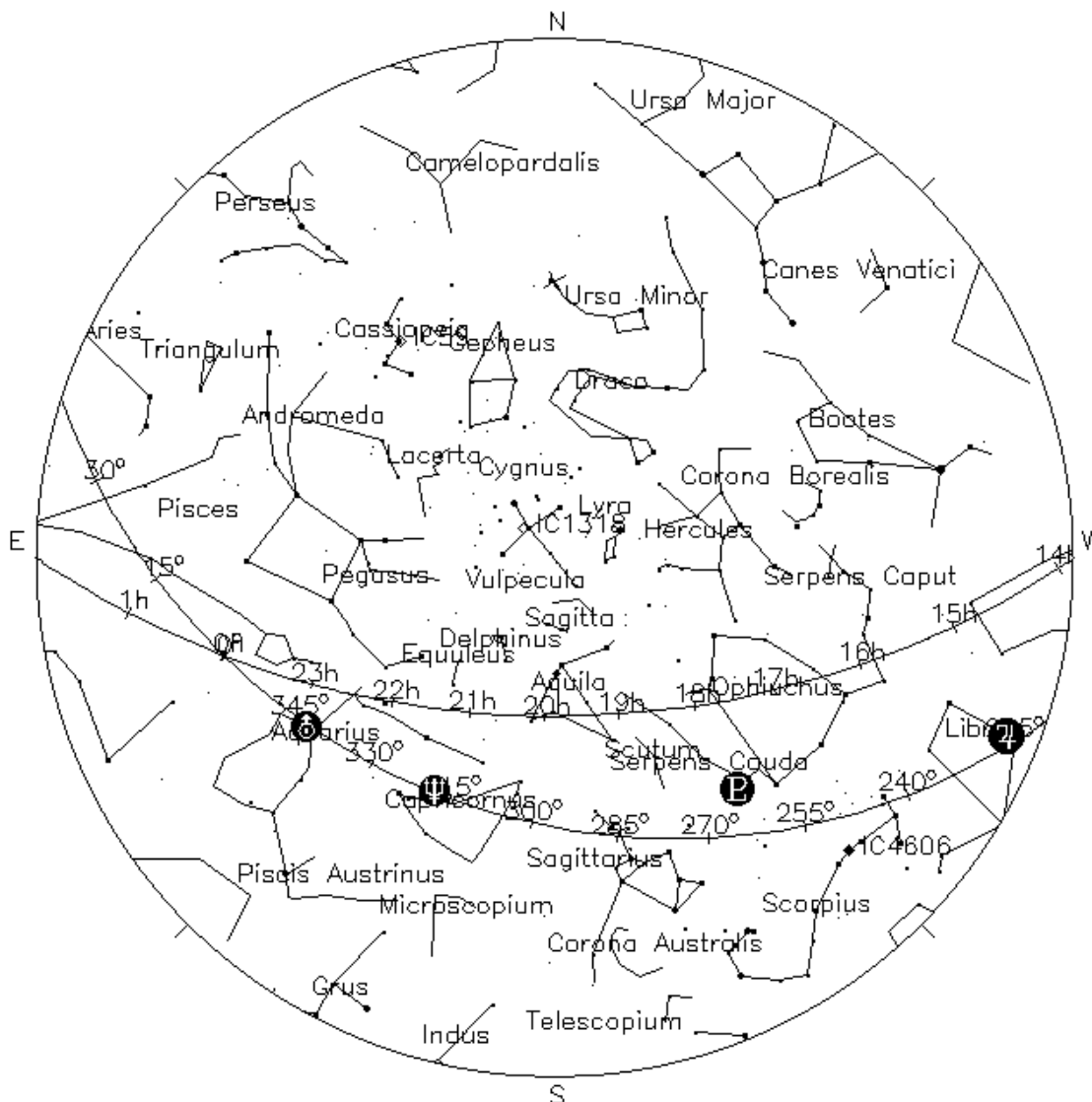
Here is the view at 9 PM in mid September, 2006, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Uranus, the circle-and-arrow symbol, will be near Aquarius. Neptune, the trident symbol, will be visible by telescope in Capricorn. Pluto will be between Sagittarius and Ophiuchus. Uranus and Neptune are easily visible by telescope, Pluto not so easily.

According to the International Meteor Organization's 2006 Meteor Shower Calendar, at <http://www.imo.net/calendar/2006>, there are three meteor showers coming up in the next few months. On Oct 21, the Orionids meteor shower will peak during a new moon, and the Zodiacal light will be visible in the East just before twilight. On Nov 19th, the Leonids will peak during a new moon. On

Dec 14, the Geminids will peak during a waning crescent moon.

To catch the peak, watch during the early morning hours of the day of the peak. For example, watch the Orionids from midnight Oct 20 until 5 am on the 21st. This is when your location on Earth is facing the direction the Earth is moving around the Sun. There will also be increased meteor activity during the days just before and after the peak. More info can be found online at the IMO, and places like <http://skytour.homestead.com/met2006.html> by Wes Stone.

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





## Eagle Scout Project Update

Skylar Call from Troop 376 finished up his Eagle Scout project on Saturday, September 2nd. He and several other volunteers arrived at 3 p.m. and began work on painting the exterior of the Swanson and Angele Observatories. They also added a new mulch bed along the planetarium foyer and repainted the VBAS logo. Work was completed around dusk, and VBAS gratefully signed off on a job well-done. Jeff Delmas invited Skylar and his parents to our upcoming Astronomy Day celebration, and extended VBAS' appreciation for the efforts of Skylar and his volunteers. Skylar's volunteers include: Ata Khan, Jason Pittman, Matt Honkanen, Steven Hwang, Tyler Goldbach, Peter Davidson, Mr.

Rogers, Korey Hardy, Jerrod Hardy, Robin Call, Kevin Call, Lorie Call, Logan Rogers, Missy Tygart, Cameron Connors, Keith Buell, Mindy Rogers, Allison Stewart, Katelynn Hillman, Mindy Rogers, Keith Buell, Joe Clark, Mr. Wingo, and Patrick Wingo.



*Kevin Call repaints the VBAS logo.*



*Skylar Call (second from right) and a few of his volunteers.*

I have an excellent 10 inch reflector, custom-made, by John Meile. I h

# VBAS Draft Member Meeting Minutes

VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM on Friday August 18, 2006

by Steve Sloan

President Jeff Delmas introduced the meeting, and asked our guests to raise their hands.

Membership secretary Linda Farnell announced that James Brefford, and James and Mary Francis Hales, are new members.

As nominating committee chairman, Steve Sloan announced that we appointed Eric Peterson as our new Director of Administration. That fills our last open board position.

Treasurer Gena Crook gave a brief Treasurer's Report [See below]. She highlighted two school bus payments, and expenditures for new carpet in the planetarium.

Jeff Delmas briefly described Skylar Call's facilities improvements. [See page 5]

Wesley Swift announced that we need to be organizing an Observatory Committee meeting soon.

Doug Horacek asked about whether he was approved for his committee, because parts of the Bylaws suggest that committee members must be approved by the board. This sparked a discussion of the Bylaws. The consensus was that committee members do not need to be approved. We will accept any willing member to any committee.

Wesley Swift is looking for people to help with lunar meteorite impact observations. The program needs amateur help to have as many eyes out there as possible, because only seven impacts have been observed so far. The program wants to do computerized analysis of amateurs' observations of the Moon, so they can find additional impacts. Wes attempted to do something similar for the Perseids, but the peak of the shower was unobservable.

## Other Committee Reports:

Melissa Snider talked about

Astronomy Day, which is scheduled for Saturday, September 30. We have found an astronomer, Timothy Dowling, to speak about Jupiter. He will come down on the 29th, then speak on Saturday evening. He didn't want money for his appearance. Astronomy Day will run from 9 AM to 1 PM in the afternoon, then run from 7 PM to whenever that evening.

Astronomy Day planning and preparation are well underway. We have subcommittees appointed, including Children's Programming, Merchandise, and Publicity. There is a draft flyer out, which Melissa asked the members to distribute.

There are several things we'll need from the members. We still need volunteers. We are looking for in-kind donations of prizes. If members have tents, we would like to borrow them. We need snack packs, juice boxes, and other similar items donated, along with cash for rocket launches.

A-Day setup starts at 7 am on September 30, then there will be an additional shift at 10 AM. Someone will be locking the planetarium at 11 PM. There are copies of the A-Day budget available, which the board needs to approve.

[Continued on next page]

7:54 PM 09/12/06 Accrual Basis				Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc. Profit & Loss August 2006	
		TOTAL			
Ordinary Income/Expense					
Income					
donation/aquarium		18.00			
Membership Dues		60.00			
Total Income		78.00			
Gross Profit		78.00			
Expense					
GRANT expenditure		1,946.20			
Observatory Maintenance		80.00			
Telephone		36.10			
Total Expense		2,062.30			
Net Ordinary Income		-1,984.30			
Net Income		-1,984.30			
beginning bank balance	\$64,717.83		ending bank balance	\$62,733.53	
ending bank balance	\$62,733.53		Grant money remaining	\$50,694.88	
difference	-\$1,984.30		difference	\$12,038.65	
certificate of deposit	\$5,000.00				

Treasurer's Report by Gena Crook

*[Continued from previous page]*

Doug Horacek volunteered to run the solar telescope 9-11 AM.

Jeff Delmas announced one final thing: the Volunteer State Star Party will be on October 27-30, in Tennessee. It takes about an hour and a half to get there -- two if you get lost. Leaving Huntsville from I-65 is faster than taking Memorial Parkway. There will be a work party to get ready, on the weekend before.

The Nashville astronomy club's star party is also coming up.

There was a brief discussion of the number of planets. Poor Pluto.

Meeting Adjourned

After the meeting, Massimiliano Bonamente, Assistant Research Professor at UAH's Physics Department and NSSTC, delivered a presentation on

## Astronomy Day Committee Report

by Melissa Snider

The Astronomy Day Committee met on Thursday, September 7 to finalize plans for Astronomy Day and the Planetarium Grand Reopening on September 30.

The schedule was finalized as follows:

### **Saturday, September 30**

#### **9 am - 1 pm Family Activities**

- Kids' tables (*Gena Crook*)
  - Galaxy Table
  - Solar System Table – Vote Pluto “In” or “Out” of the Solar System!
  - Black Hole/Gravity Table
  - The Power of Optics hands-on demo, presented by *Wesley Swift*.
- Activities for the whole family
  - Hourly star shows in the planetarium
  - Observatory Tours
  - Solar Observing
  - Chandra X-Ray Telescope exhibit with *David Hood*, MSFC
  - Night-Sky-Friendly Lighting demonstrations by *Richard Norman*.
  - Food, Door Prizes and Raffle!

#### **1 pm Grand Re-Opening & Ribbon Cutting**

*Speakers:* Mayor *Loretta Spencer*, *Jeff Delmas* (VBAS President), *Ken Farnell* (VBAS Research/Planning Director), *Dwight McGee* (MSCS), *Jim Ellis* (NASA Education Office)

*Invited Guests:* Congressman *Bud Cramer* and *Skylar Call* (Eagle Scout Candidate)

#### **7 - 10 pm Evening Shows & Observing**

(*Michael Cowger* will confirm speaker names on 9/14)

Special guest speakers will present current astronomy research and discoveries.

Planetarium Show times: 7:00 pm and 8:30 pm.

Observing on the grounds, from dark until we drop!

**Opportunities to help: (Contact Melissa Snider, [melissas@spacecamp.com](mailto:melissas@spacecamp.com) or 256-539-3796!)**

- Loan us a shade tent
- Donate binoculars, a membership or a favorite astronomy book to our raffle
- Bring your telescope for public observing
- Volunteer to help with setup, parking, takedown, or advertising

### 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.

### Reprints

Permission is hereby granted to any non-profit astronomical association to reprint, in whole or in part, any article in this or past *Via Stellaris*. We ask that credit be given to the *Via Stellaris*, Von Braun Astronomical Society, date of issue, and author of article used.

## VIA STELLARIS



A Publication of the  
Von Braun Astronomical Society  
A Member of the Astronomical League  
P. O. Box 1142  
Huntsville, AL 35807-1142

*Address Service Requested*

**VBAS Members:** Help VBAS save costs by taking *Via Stellaris* by email. Email me at [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org)!

**Other Astronomical Societies:** To save costs and clutter for everyone, we would prefer to send *Via Stellaris*, and receive your newsletter, electronically rather than by mail. Please send your email address to [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org), and we can arrange something.