

# VIA STELLARIS

*The Monthly Newsletter of the Von Braun Astronomical Society*

## VBAS Highlights for May

### Public Programs for May

Our Annual Member's Meeting will be held on Friday, May 18th at 7:30 pm. The rest of the year, VBAS Monthly 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.

Planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. Steve Noneman will discuss finding water on the Moon on May 12. Melissa Snider and Mitzi Adams will present a children's program on "Harry Potter Astronomy" on May 19. Chuck Pierce will be presenting "Rocket Science 101" on May 26. 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

On page 2, Jeff Delmas discusses the Annual Meeting, the Messier Marathon, and the restroom addition. On page 3, he gives a full Messier Marathon report.

### Annual Members Meeting

The Annual Members Meeting will be held on Friday, May 18, at 7:30 pm. This is the big one! We will be having board/officer elections, and we will be presenting the VBAS budget for the year. The program will be a presentation by John Miele on Astrophotography.

### Randolph Science Club Digitizes the Library

On page 7, John Young describes our volunteers' progress building an electronic catalog for the Sanford Library.

### "Signature of Light" Update

See page 7 for an update on David Lofts' science fair results.

### Earth Day at Hayes Preserve

Richard Norman reports on his efforts at the Earth Day event, with the help of Melissa Snider's photos, on page 8.

### Lunar Eclipse Photos

Photos of the recent lunar eclipse are on page 8.

### Mid-South Star Gaze 2007

On page 9, John Miele reports on his time at the event.

### VBAS Member Meeting and Board Meeting Minutes

Page 10 has the draft minutes of last month's members meeting, and page 11 has the draft board meeting minutes.

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

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## President's Message

by *Jeff Delmas*

Our next members' meeting on May 18th is designated as our annual meeting. We'll hold elections and present the budget plan approved by the board of directors to the membership for the coming fiscal year. The ballot for the election is included with this *Via Stellaris*. You can mail it in or bring it with you to the May meeting.

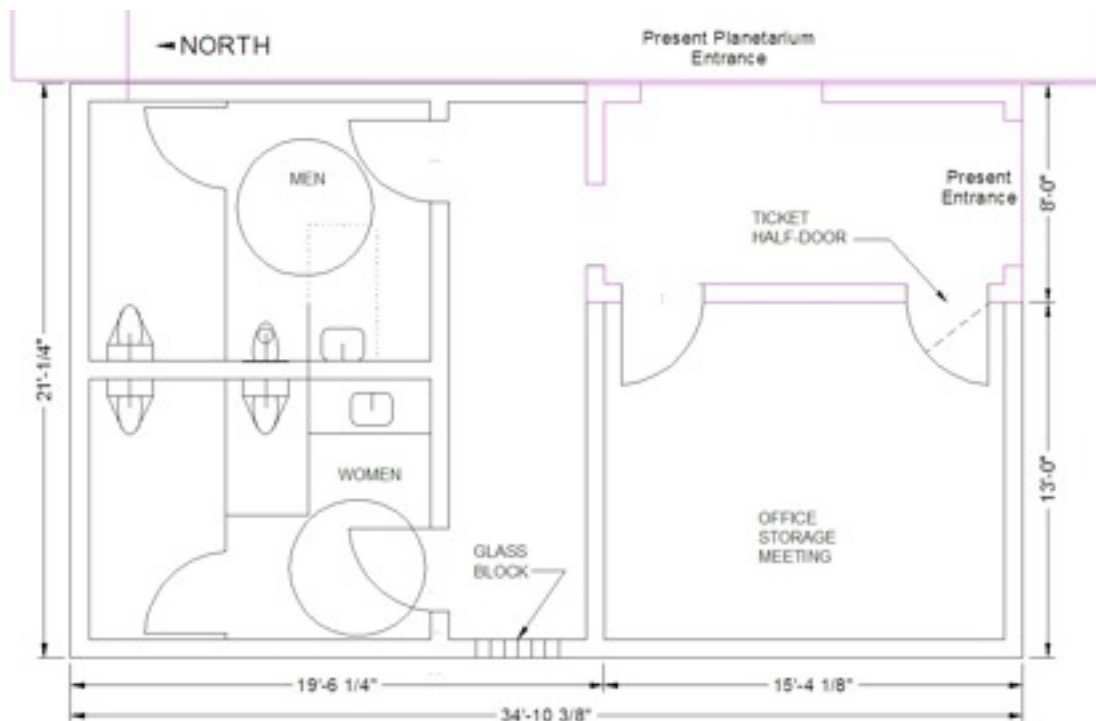
I hope you made it to the Messier Marathon at our April meeting. It turned out to be a wonderful evening of viewing with many attendees and telescopes. Read more about it on Page 3.

I also want to take a few moments to update everyone on our restroom addition plans. We've been working with local architect Gerry Simpson, who's taken our requirements and budget and developed a design that was approved by the board of directors at our last meeting on April 5th. The addition will provide women's and men's restroom facilities and a

ticket/gift shop area. I just recently learned from our Facilities Director, John Young, that approval for the plan by the Alabama State Park representative has also been secured, paving the way for completion of the project this year.

Gerry has also encouraged us to consider long-term plans to modify the front of the planetarium, Swanson, and Angele with an addition to unite the three buildings into a single structure. Such plans are only conceptual at this time, but give us a goal for future efforts.

The restroom plan is shown in the image below. Note that North is to the left and the current foyer is outlined magenta.



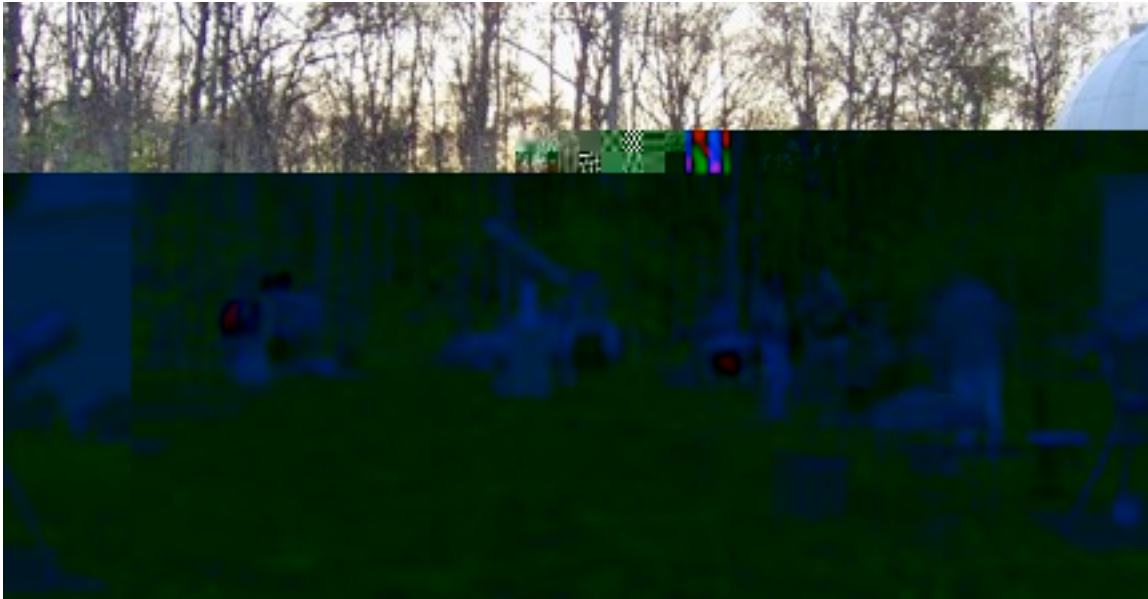
*Restroom Addition Plan*

## April's Messier Marathon a Hit

by Jeff Delmas

Our Messier Marathon on April 20 turned out to be nearly ideal! We had about 20 member telescopes out viewing through the evening, along with several society scopes, including the 18" Dobsonian, 6" Astro-Physics Starfire refractor, and the new 14" LX200 GOTO scope. The skies were clear and the temperature stayed above 50, to make for a fine evening of observing. Attendance was high for this event, with 30-50 members and friends joining in to savor the sights. We were very pleased to welcome five members of the Shoals Astronomy Club, who visited our facilities for

of a Messier observing certificate. The observing certificate is part of an Astronomical League (AL) program to promote observing skills. The Messier certificate is only one of more than 25 observing achievements available through the AL. At the meeting, John Young unveiled a new plaque to honor VBAS members who have attained AL observing awards. Special thanks go out to B. J. Bjorkman, owner of Madison Monogram, who provided plates and engraving at a very low price, and to Garrett Roberts for his woodworking donation.



*Setting Up for the 2007 Messier Marathon.*

the first time. They were Paul Daniel, Stan Peck, Roy Long, Gary Blackmon, and Jason Green. It was a great time to meet other observers, view through a variety of telescopes, and generally learn more about the night skies. We're in the planning stages for future observing events like this one.

I logged 27 of the Messier objects. I didn't get more since I was focusing my efforts on objects that I haven't yet logged in my pursuit

The biggest problem we had in the observing field that evening is really an ever-growing problem in the area - light pollution. The skies were rather clear, but the skyglow from the city lights

prevented us from viewing the fainter objects in the Messier catalog. I'm afraid that may be a long-term problem at our observing field. Rapid housing growth in the north and east of the city makes it certain to be worse in the future if nothing is done to stem the tide. But you can do something! Please contact Richard Norman ([Richard.Norman@nasa.gov](mailto:Richard.Norman@nasa.gov)), our Dark Sky Representative, to learn more about

how you can help take action to reduce light pollution.



*New Plaque Honors VBAS Members Who Attain  
Astronomical League Observing Certificates*

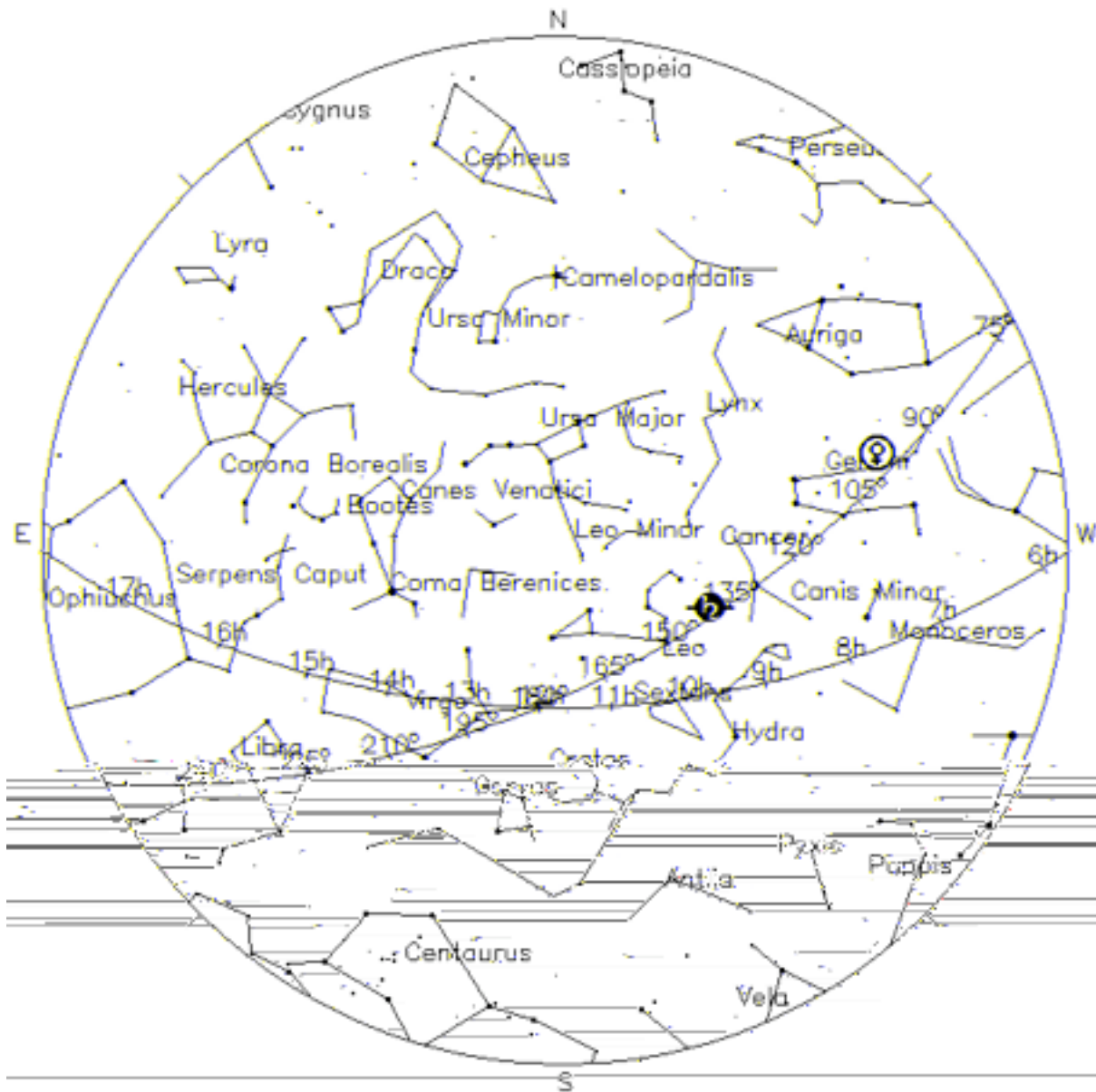


*More Messier Marathon Setup*

# The Night Sky for May, 2007

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid May, 2007, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Jupiter, the lowercase-h symbol, will be almost overhead, between Leo and Cancer. Venus will still be visible in Gemini.

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



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## VBAS Calendar of Events, May through June

*Saturday, May 5, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities.

*Saturday, May 12, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: Got Water??**

*Presented by Steve Noneman.*

By going to the Moon for extended periods of time, astronauts will search for resources and learn how to work safely in a harsh environment - stepping stones to future exploration. Just like on Earth, water is a crucial resource on the Moon. It will not be practical to transport to space the amount of water needed for human and exploration needs, so it is critical to find natural resources, such as water, on the Moon. Join **Steve Noneman**, NASA Program Manager for the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) mission that will begin the search for water on the Moon.

*Friday, May 18, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Annual Members Meeting**

This is the big one! We will be holding board/officer elections, and presenting the VBAS annual budget. The program will be a presentation by John Miele on Astrophotography. Visitors are Welcome!

*Saturday, May 19, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Committee Meeting and Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities, and attend this month's Facilities Committee Meeting.

*Saturday, May 19, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Children's Planetarium Show: Harry Potter Astronomy**

*Presented by Melissa Snider and Mitzi Adams*

*Saturday, May 26, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: Rocket Science 101**

*Presented by Chuck Pierce*

Today's rockets are remarkable collections of human ingenuity. The rockets and spaceships of today and the spaceships of the future have their roots in the science and technology of the past. They are natural outgrowths of literally thousands of years of experimentation and research on rockets and rocket propulsion. Join NASA Rocket Scientist **Chuck Pierce** as he delves into the history of rockets, and highlights the success, and sometimes spectacular failures.

*Friday, June 15, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

...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> .

VBAS' avid amateur astronomers will be pleased to know that one more resource tool has been recently honed. The majority of the Sanford Library has been electronically inventoried, courtesy of members of the Randolph HS Science Club. With direct support from their teacher and advisor, Mrs. Meryal Smith, these young men and women initiated contact with VBAS back in mid-January looking for a volunteer service project. Discussion among several VBAS board members yielded many projects that could greatly benefit from a small army of energetic youth. They readily accepted, and chose to focus their effort on bringing our extensive library into the digital age, by conducting a thorough asset inventory. Their first visit to VBAS on March 3rd enabled the

## Earth Day at the Hayes Preserve

by *Richard Norman*

On Sat April 21, Soos Weber hosted a wonderful Earth Day Event at the Hayes Preserve, which is nestled under the trees by the Flint River. James Brelsford and Melissa Snider found a sunny spot by the main path to set up a couple of Coronado PST hydrogen Alpha Telescopes. The sun finally cooperated with a few flares, but was mostly quiet. We also set up a table by the main path to tell folks about VBAS, light pollution, and the International Dark Sky Park project. About 10 folks that came by were not fully aware of the source or impact of light pollution, and were glad to know more about it. The folks that were familiar with the problem were glad to see folks doing something about it. The NASA lights at night poster that Brenda Rogers picked up for us worked well to bring folks over to the table. It was a good outreach effort in a pleasant setting. The owl, ducks, and black bear were interesting to see as well, and we didn't even go on the hikes. The owl and ducks were native, but the black bear was a cub brought in by the wildlife folks.



## Lunar Eclipse Photos



*Doug Horacek, Scott McCluney, John Miele, and John Young (left to right) at the eastern overlook in the Monte Sano State Park.*



## Mid-South Star Gaze (MSSG) 2007

by John Miele

The Midsouth Star Gaze was held from Wednesday, April 11, to Sunday, April 15, at Rainwater observatory near French Camp, MS. Scott McCluney and I drove down on Thursday. There were a few bad omens to start off the trip. First, Jim Fly had his new camper stolen just a few days before the Stargaze was to begin. Second, all interstate traffic was diverted on I-65 around Cullman, and we had to creep along for miles, causing us to lose a good bit of time. Combined with the fact we left an hour late because I had to take my daughter to school that morning, and help her look in the lost and found for a missing lunchbox and jacket, we did not arrive until 2:30 pm. This turned out to be ok because we still snagged a couple of berths in the new bunkhouse near the observing field, and we were able to set up on the field next to Jim Fly (sans camper) and Darren Hiebert. Jim arrived 45 minutes before we did. Darren arrived the day before and reported clear skies Wednesday night. Below is a shot of the observing field on Thursday.

Steve Sauerwein arrived Thursday afternoon. Thursday night was clear, and we had an excellent night of observing. Darren brought some homemade Baclava that we all snacked on during the evening. The highlight of the night for Scott and me was using a Malincam Hyper Plus video camera for about an hour in Scott's telescope (a Nexstar C11). Thanks are extended to Jack

Huercamp for letting us try his camera out. We viewed the camera's images on Jack's portable DVD player. The camera was capable of integrating video frames for effective exposure times up to 56 seconds. This allowed a tremendous amount of detail to be seen in many galaxies like M51, M104, M81, M82 and Centaurus A. We also spent some time viewing the planetary nebula NGC 4361 in Corvus, and noted two curved extensions and a faint shell around the nebula. By 3:00 am we had to call it quits due to fatigue, but not before we turned the C11s towards Jupiter and saw lots of details using a set of Denkmeier binoviewers. Unfortunately, in an almost exact repeat of last year's weather, a strong frontal system was headed our way. The forecast was severe thunderstorms, possible tornados and heavy rain for the rest of the weekend. With almost no chance for clearing Friday or Saturday, the VBAS folks packed up and glumly left for home Friday afternoon.

John Miele



## VBAS Draft Member Meeting Minutes

VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM

Friday, April 20, 2006

by Steve Sloan

President Jeff Delmas introduced the meeting at 7:41 PM. There were no new members, but we had five guests from the Shoals Astronomy Club. Steve Sloan gave a quick review of last month's minutes.

### Facilities Committee

There was a work party scheduled for the following Saturday, but it probably wouldn't start until about noon. There were electrical items to take care of in the storage room, and a couple of things on the Stuhlinger.

### Nominating Committee

There will be a formal announcement of candidates soon. As of the meeting, the committee was still taking nominations. John Young will be leaving as Director of Facilities, to run for Vice President. Melissa Snider will run again as Director of Education and Programs. The committee has a name [Falangiel?] for Treasurer. As of the meeting, the committee was looking for a Facilities Director, and they were canvassing the membership for a John replacement.

### Randolph Student Volunteers

According to John, their second visit was the day of the meeting. They've been working to electronically catalog the library. There are nearly a thousand books in the VBAS collection, and they got about 150 in the first round. There were many spreadsheets filled in. Phill has started putting the catalog online. Each book has title, author, date, and summary.

### Restroom Addition

Jeff showed Gerry Simpson's current design. Doug asked if there was supposed to be an extension over the whole building. Jeff responded that that is part of the long-term plan.

### Program

After the meeting, there was a short presentation on *Earning an Observing Certificate from the Astronomical League*. There was also a special presentation by John Young. He showed off a new plaque, commemorating the certificates earned by members since 1977. There are currently 24 members with Messier Certificates. There are also a few names in the Advanced column, who have earned even more challenging certificates.

The meeting and presentations ended at 8:03 pm. The Messier Marathon event immediately followed the meeting.

	Partial Budget 2007 Feb. 1 to Jun. 30	Actuals Apr. 5, 2007	Remaining
<b>Income</b>			
Donations	292	142.55	
Membership Dues	1458	1609.00	
Program Fees	1042	1025.00	
Interest	0		
Food Sales	83	7.00	
Gift Shop Sales	292	185.00	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>3167</b>	<b>2968.55</b>	
<b>Expense</b>			
Astronomical League	333		
Membership			
Liability Insurance	104		
Professional Fees	0		
Lease		1.00	
Newsletter	333		
Phone	188	107.28	80.22
Website	125	80.85	44.15
PO Box	30		
Awards	42		
By-Laws Mailing	0		
Postage	100	70.88	29.12
Printing	150	17.06	132.94
S&T Magazine	14	32.95	
Bank Service Charge	0		
USSRC Presenter	0		
Food Purchases	104	10.64	93.53
Gift Shop Purchases	42	92.85	
<b>Facilities</b>			
Supplies	104	45.68	58.49
Grounds	42	25.78	15.89
Buildings	709	107.25	601.75
<b>Total Facilities</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>178.71</b>	<b>676.12</b>
<b>Library</b>			
<b>Planetarium</b>			
Maintenance	352	350.00	2.08
Publicity	63		
Speaker Honoraria			
<b>Total Planetarium</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>350.00</b>	<b>64.58</b>
<b>Observatory</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>307.28</b>	<b>26.05</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>3167</b>	<b>1249.50</b>	<b>1917.83</b>
Lawn Mower/Leaf Blower	1500	1534.46	-34.46

2007 Budget, by Gena Crook

## VBAS Draft Board Meeting Minutes

*VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM on Monday April 16, 2007*  
by Steve Sloan

The board meeting was called to order at 7:37 PM. Board members present were Michael Cowger, Gena Crook, Jeff Delmas, Steve Sloan, and John Young. Four board members are required for a quorum. Planetarium Director Roy Young was also present.

John Young moved to accept last month's board minutes. Gena seconded, and the motion carried.

We hadn't heard any more from Melissa about the Astronomical League's bylaws changes.

The upcoming member's meeting will entail a short business meeting, then we will go out for the Messier Marathon as soon as possible. Do we need any preparation for the Marathon? Should we have refreshments? Michael will bring pizza and soft drinks. What will the public turnout for the Messier Marathon be? We haven't really advertised it to the general public.

### Budget

Finalizing the budget was one of the most important reasons for this meeting. We needed to review or modify the budget, then approve it that night.

Budget discussion followed. The most notable change from last year's budget was due to web site costs. We're in the process of moving the VBAS web site to Michael and Eric's server, so web hosting will be free. Their server is in Michael's data center.

The budget balanced to \$8300 for both income and expenses. John moved that the board approve the budget as revised at the meeting. Michael seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

According to the bylaws, the budget must be approved before the May annual meeting, and presented to the membership at that meeting.

### Lock Box

We need a secure place to store meteorites in the storage room. The proposed bathrooms have an office addition, so maybe they can be stored there in the future. Maybe we can make a separate key for the telescope storage room and the library, to make the library more accessible. Jeff recommended tabling

the discussion until the meteorites are stored at the VBAS facilities again. Apparently, they have been here since November. However, John moved to table the discussion, and Michael seconded. On a related note, we need metal doors on the outside of the planetarium.

### Nominating Committee

Michael will send out emails with the list of candidates soon. There are currently no candidates for Facilities Director. Some possible candidates are still thinking about it. According to the Bylaws, the Nominating Committee must report a slate of candidates at the April members' meeting.

### 50th Anniversary Planning

Some neat ideas were bounced around by Michael and Melissa. They should be ready to announce something by the May Meeting.

### May Annual Meeting Planning

We may have a potluck dinner for the May meeting, as incentive to get people to come. Some things will have to be assigned, or possibly VBAS can buy those things (plates and cups, for example). We'll talk more about the details at the members' meeting.

### Restroom Addition

Architect Gerry Simpson came to report. Michael asked if we'll replace the roof over the foyer when we build the bathrooms. Gerry said we'll finish building the new walls before removing the old roof. Could we knock out some of the foyer's internal walls, to make a more open area? Probably not, because we'll need a light lock. Could we add a water fountain? Possibly on the opposite side of the wall from the bathroom sinks. Gerry said that internal walls allow the roof support members to be cheaper. We came up with three official requests:

- (a) Flip the women's bathroom door to open to the outside.
- (b) Add more glass blocks to the office area.
- (c) Tie the hallway into existing heat and air. Exhaust fans will pull the heated or cooled air from the halls, into the bathrooms.

According to Roy, NASA Public Affairs has Hubble and Chandra models they'd like to give us. We'll probably need a display case for them.

Jeff said we needed to make our commitment to the design Gerry presented that night, so Gerry can get started.

Gena moved that we accept Gerry's design, with the listed modifications. John seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

### Planetarium Projector

Wayne at Walker County has a scheme to get his school system to give us the planetarium projector he promised. He will only make one request per month, so he doesn't make five major requests at once. If everything goes as planned, it will probably be May or June when he brings up cleaning out their storage room, which will entail giving us the projector.

We'll target July to install the new projector. The 50th anniversary is planned for fall. According to

Roy, we have no shows currently planned for June, and we probably don't want to schedule shows during bathroom construction. Jeff said we shouldn't make plans not to do shows, because these construction plans are too unpredictable so far, and we may be able to work around the construction when the time comes.

Gena moved to adjourn the board meeting at 8:58 PM. The motion carried.

Accounting of Grant Funds 4/5/07	Total Jul'05- Dec'06	Net Funds Remaining	Jan '07	Feb '07	Mar '07	Apr '07	May '07	Total	Net Funds Remaining
Income									
MSCS	46700.00								
Planetarium Equipment	8554.85								
Observatory Equipment	5805.96								
School Partnership	10267.79								
Planetarium Programs	600.00								
Roof Repair	10800.00								
Restroom Facility	26505.40								
Electrical Work/Fire Door	5000.00								
Parking/Septic	10000.00								
Carpet	3000.00								
Paint	2750.00								
Sidewalk Astronomy	10184.00								
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>140168.00</b>								
Expenditures									
MSCS	46700.00	<b>0.00</b>						46700.00	<b>0.00</b>
Planetarium Equipment	7290.09	<b>1264.76</b>	64.79	92.06				7446.94	<b>1107.91</b>
Observatory Equipment	3805.96	<b>2000.00</b>						3805.96	<b>2000.00</b>
School Partnership	5668.13	<b>4599.66</b>	192.88	353.62	218.00	94.71		6527.34	<b>3740.45</b>
Planetarium Programs	600.00	<b>0.00</b>						600.00	<b>0.00</b>
Roof Repair	10800.00	<b>0.00</b>						10800.00	<b>0.00</b>
Restroom Facility	0.00	<b>26505.40</b>						0.00	<b>26505.40</b>
Electrical Work/Fire Door	0.00	<b>5000.00</b>		299.09				299.09	<b>4700.91</b>
Parking/Septic	450.00	<b>9550.00</b>						450.00	<b>9550.00</b>
Carpet	2981.20	<b>18.80</b>						2981.20	<b>18.80</b>
Paint	2899.22	<b>(149.22)</b>						2899.22	<b>(149.22)</b>
Sidewalk Astronomy	9216.44	<b>967.56</b>						9216.44	<b>967.56</b>
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>90411.04</b>	<b>49756.96</b>	<b>257.67</b>	<b>744.77</b>	<b>218.00</b>	<b>94.71</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>91726.19</b>	<b>48441.81</b>

*April 2007 NASA Grant Accounting, by Gena Crook*

		<b>Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc.</b>	
		<b>Profit &amp; Loss</b>	
		<b>March 2007</b>	
3:02 PM			
04/05/07			
Accrual Basis			
	<b>TOTAL</b>		
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>			
<b>Income</b>			
donation	0.05		
donation /aquarium	33.00		
donations/auction	74.50		
Food sales	7.00		
Gift Shop Sales	52.00		
Magazine Income	266.75		
Membership Dues	924.00		
Program Fees	297.00		
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,654.30</b>		
<b>Gross Profit</b>	1,654.30		
<b>Expense</b>			
Gift Shop Purchase	92.85		
GRANT expenditure	218.00	school programs	
Observatory Maintenance	9.00		
Printing	10.78		
Telephone	35.75		
Website	53.90		
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>420.28</b>		
<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<b>1,234.02</b>		
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>1,234.02</b>		
beginning bank balance	\$59,481.05		
ending bank balance	\$60,715.07	ending bank balance	\$60,715.07
difference	\$1,234.02	Grant money remaining	\$48,536.52
		difference	\$12,178.55
certificate of deposit	\$5,147.46		

*March 2007 Profit and Loss Statement, by Gena Crook*

### 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)



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*

ELECTION BALLOT

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***VBAS Officer Ballot***

*Vice President*

\_\_\_\_\_ John Young

\_\_\_\_\_ Write-in: \_\_\_\_\_

*Director of Facilities and Equipment*

\_\_\_\_\_ Eric Peterson

\_\_\_\_\_ Write-in: \_\_\_\_\_

*Director of Education and Programs*

\_\_\_\_\_ Melissa Snider

\_\_\_\_\_ Write-in: \_\_\_\_\_

*Treasurer*

\_\_\_\_\_ Sara Neale

\_\_\_\_\_ Write-in: \_\_\_\_\_

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# ELECTION BALLOT

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## ***Election Ballot***



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*

Place  
Stamp  
Here