



VBAS Highlights for October

Public Programs for October

Our next member’s meeting will be held on Friday, October 19th at 7 p.m. For the member meeting, after discussing upcoming VBAS & Astronomy related activities of interest to our Members, Dr. Charles Meegan will present an intriguing project overview on the Gamma-Ray Large Area Space Telescope (GLAST) Burst Monitor. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 p.m.; they’re open to the public and are free.

Astronomy Day, our free, annual open house, will be held from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday, October 20. Guest speakers will be *Rocket Boys* author and NASA scientist Homer Hickam, and local space entrepreneur Tim Pickens. Our own Beth Bero will present planetarium programs “Spooky Skies” and “VBAS History and the Night Sky.”

Regular planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. We have several shows coming up in November and December. 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.

Living Off the Land in Space Update

Regular planetarium presenter Les Johnson has a new book out, detailing the topic he covered at a planetarium show last January. See page 3 for details.

Astronomy Day Preview

Page 5 has a report on the event coming up Saturday, October 20.

Inaugural VBAS Program Committee Meeting

On page 5, learn how you can get in on the ground floor, helping give VBAS fascinating programming for our Member Meetings.

VBAS “Out of This World” Runner-Up

VBAS was one of five runners-up for the Astronomy magazine “Out of This World” outreach award. See page 5 for details.

Mirror Grinding-Polishing Machine Needs a Good Home

On page 6, John Young offers a nice piece of optical manufacturing equipment.

New Messier Certificate

Jeff Delmas earns his Messier Certificate. See page 6 for details.

Dark Sky Status

On page 7, the North Alabama Sierra Club has voted to support the International Dark Sky Park initiative (ISDP), and Richard reports that the first International Dark Sky Reserve was announced.

Steve Sloan
Via Stellaris Editor
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In This Issue:

VBAS Highlights for October.....	1
Calendar of Events.....	2
<i>Living Off the Land in Space</i> Update.....	3
The Night Sky for October.....	4
Astronomy Day Preview.....	5
VBAS Program Committee Meeting.....	5
VBAS “Out of This World”....	5
Mirror Grinding-Polishing Machine Needs a Home.....	6
Jeff Earns Messier Certificate.....	6
Dark Sky Status Reports.....	7

Deadline for November 2007 Via Stellaris submissions is Monday, October 29.



VBAS Calendar of Events, October through November

Saturday, October 6, 2007, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Sally Ride Science Festival

Location: University of Alabama in Huntsville

Eduardo Mendoza and **John Young** will have a VBAS booth set up with static displays including telescopes, the Davis meteorite collection, and hands-on optics. The Festival is geared towards encouraging young girls to explore science and technology, and will have workshops for children and adults. Featured guest speaker will be Huntsville native and former NASA astronaut, Dr. Jan Davis. For more info see: www.sallyridefestivals.com/07uah1006/index.shtml

Saturday, October 6, 2007, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Native American Star Stories

Presented by Melissa Snider

See the skies through the eyes of native tribes including the Cherokee, Creek, and others from throughout the Americas. In an evening of twilight storytelling, you'll meet clever Coyote and learn his role in placing the stars in the heavens.

Friday October 12 - Saturday October 14, 2007

Fourth Annual Volunteer State Star Party

Location: Meriwether Lewis Observatory Dark Sky Site, Summertown, Tennessee

Presented by Eric Johnson

VBAS member Eric Johnson is opening up his dark sky site in Southern Tennessee for a weekend of observing, good food, and plenty of hospitality starting on Friday evening, Oct. 12th through Sunday, Oct. 14th. Primitive camping on site with facilities or camping at the nearby Meriwether Lewis Park on the historic Natchez Trace. The site is between Hohenwald and Summertown, TN. The Volunteer State Star Party is always free to astronomers, and Eric only requests that you RSVP by email to ejohnso4@yahoo.com or call (931) 628-6467 if you plan to attend. There will be door prizes for those bringing telescopes. Check vbas.org for directions and more information.

Monday, October 15, 2007, 6:30 PM

Astronomy Day Planning Meeting

Friday, October 19, 2007, 7:00 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business. Former VBAS president and GBM principal investigator, Dr. Charles Meegan, will present an intriguing project overview on the

Gamma-Ray Large Area Space Telescope (GLAST) Burst Monitor. GLAST is scheduled to launch in early 2008! Visitors are welcome.

Saturday, October 20, 2007

Astronomy Day

Location: VBAS Planetarium

Join us any time after 10 am for our free annual open house known as Astronomy Day! Here is a brief schedule:

- 10 AM and 12 PM Beth Bero presents Spooky Skies
- 5:30 PM Local space entrepreneur Tim Pickens speaks
- 6:30 PM Beth Bero presents VBAS History & Night Sky
- 7:30 PM Rocket Boys author and NASA engineer Homer Hickam speaks
- 8:00 PM Star Party

For more details, see page 5 of the Via Stellaris, and check our website at www.vbas.org.

Friday, November 2, 2007, 6:30 PM

VBAS Program Committee Meeting

Inaugural meeting of the committee tasked with developing a series of programs to be presented at each of the Society's membership meetings. See page 5 for more details.

Saturday, November 3, 2007, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Our Magnetic Earth

Presented by Cassie Lofts

Magnets are a part of our everyday lives. We even live on a gigantic magnet – our earth. Come explore the properties of magnets with hands-on activities. We will also discuss where the idea that earth is a magnet came from and how our understanding has changed throughout history, as well as look at the current research on this topic. We will also learn about the most beautiful magnetic phenomenon on earth – the aurora.

Saturday, November 10, 2007, 6:30 PM

Open Observing Session

Presented by John Young

We'll have a brief tour of the facilities and an intro to the night sky. We'll then get scopes set up and have some fun. With a new moon and colder and drier fall weather the sky is indeed the limit! Celestial treats like galaxies, nebulae, star clusters, and planets await! Members and public welcome to bring your own scopes.

Friday, November 16, 2007, 7:00 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business. VBAS member and UAH astronomy professor, Dr. Russel White, will be the speaker for the evening. His topic for the evening will be – The Search for Young Planets. Just over one decade ago the first extrasolar planet orbiting a Sun-like star was discovered. Now there are over 250 extrasolar planets known, many of which have properties very different from the planets within our own solar system. The peculiar properties of these planets forced sweeping changes in the standard scenario describing how planets form. These new theories, however, remain largely untested. Dr. White will summarize a novel on-going search for recently formed planets that potentially offers powerful observational constraints on when and how planets form. Visitors are welcome.

Saturday, November 17, 2007, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Collision Course

Presented by Bill Cooke

Join NASA astronomer Bill Cooke as he describes how every year in mid-November, the Earth circling the sun at over sixty thousand miles an hour, passes through grains of rock, most no larger than a speck of sand, left behind by a comet as it travels through the solar system. So small are these granules, and so swift is their destruction, that when we see one of these flashes and exclaim to a friend "Look, a shooting star," and they ask "Where?" the answer always is "Too late." In that second it vaporized. Visitors are welcome.

Saturday, December 1st, 8th, and 15th, 2007, 7:30 PM

Christmas Star Show

What exactly was the object that the wise men saw? Was it a star that stood in the sky two-thousand years ago and marked a single location in Bethlehem? Each year at this special time, we turn back the hands of time to look into the sky of long ago and to search for this mysterious object. As we ponder the skies of Bethlehem, we'll explore several possibilities, including comets, meteors, novae and other phenomena.

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

Living Off the Land in Space Update

Last January, Les Johnson and Greg Matloff presented a program at the VBAS Planetarium on their book, *Living Off the Land in Space*. Unfortunately, the book had not yet been published when they gave the talk, and several people in the audience asked about buying it after the program. The book is now available at bookstores. Here is the Amazon link:

<http://www.amazon.com/Living-Off-Land-Space-Cosmos/dp/0387360549>



Astronomy Day, Von Braun Astronomical Society's Open House

Saturday, October 20th, 10 am until 10 pm.

Join us any time after 10 am for our free annual open house known as Astronomy Day on Saturday, October 20th!

From 10 am until 5 pm, we'll have hourly planetarium shows, tours of our facilities, and several hands-on astronomy- and space science-related activities for visitors of all ages, including solar viewing, rocket launches, and discussions about how to buy or even build the right telescope for you.

From 6 to 9 pm, we will have special planetarium programs and Homer Hickam, author of "Rocket Boys", will be one of our guest speakers!

After 8 pm, weather permitting, we invite you to view the night sky with us through our telescopes as VBAS members explain several magnificent wonders!

Food and beverages will be sold throughout the day, so come join us for lunch and/or dinner.

Remember that the Monte Sano State Park entrance fee of \$4 is waived for this, as well as any other VBAS related event!

Additional details will be posted soon on our website at www.vbas.org.

Inaugural VBAS Program Committee Meeting

VBAS' Program Committee will have its inaugural meeting on Friday, November 2nd at 6:30 p.m. in the planetarium. The committee is currently tasked with developing a series of programs to be presented at each of the Society's membership meetings. As members we have a vested interest in making our meetings exciting and informative with fresh programs

and speakers of interest to our varied pursuits. Accordingly, attendance and involvement is encouraged, appreciated, and open to any member who wants to get involved. Please contact John Young at 464-7998 or email jgy71@bellsouth.net if you want to join.

Hope to see you there !

VBAS Chosen as Runner-Up

by Jeff Delmas

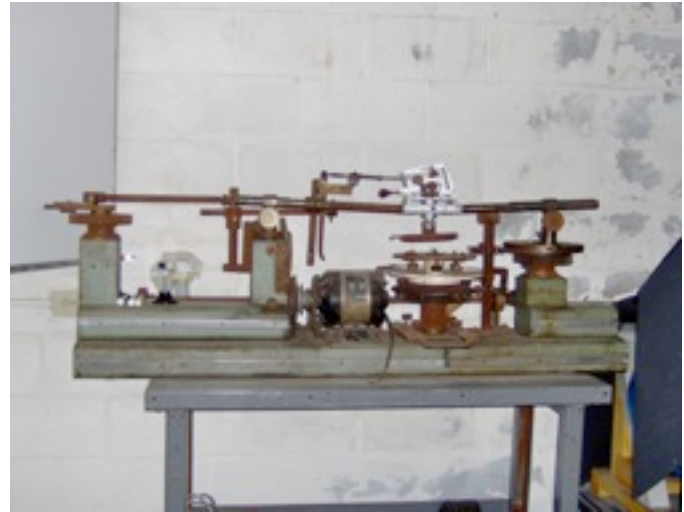
VBAS was chosen as one of five runners-up in the Astronomy magazine "Out-of-this-world" outreach award program. There were 41 entries submitted for the contest this year and we were one of six finalists. Our submission highlighted the school program we conducted under the NASA grant along with other outreach programs, including this summer's Side-

walk Astronomy at the "Concerts in the Park". The winner has yet to be announced, but the winner and runners-up should be posted soon on the Astronomy magazine website. The winner receives a \$2500 grant. The recognition is a great "thumbs-up" for the efforts of those involved in our school outreach and sidewalk astronomy efforts!

Mirror Grinding-Polishing Machine Needs a Good Home

by John Young

The mirror grinding-polishing machine in the Angele foyer is in need of a good home. It was constructed some years ago by an acquaintance of our Observatory Director, Wes Swift. It's approximately five feet long by a foot and a half wide and is quite heavy. The bowl should accommodate a piece of 10" material and the motor is 110 VAC, 6 amps, 1/3 HP. It is essentially unknown when the unit was last used and it is hoped that someone will be able to put it to good use. Generosity in the form of a donation is greatly appreciated. Please contact John Young at 797-6038 or jgy71@bellsouth.net, or Wes Swift at wesley.swift@nasa.gov, if you're interested.



Delmas Earns Messier Certificate

This past June 22nd at 1:40 am, Jeff Delmas logged his 110th Messier object, M75, a compact globular cluster in Sagittarius, while observing at Eric Johnson's home in Ardmore, TN. He later submitted his log to VBAS Observatory Director Wesley Swift, who then notified the Astronomical League (AL) of Delmas' accomplishment. The AL sponsors several observing clubs with the purpose of promoting structured observing among the AL members. Those who meet the requirements receive a certificate and pin commemorating the accomplishment. If you are interested in learning more about the Messier certificate program or any of the observing programs, contact Wes Swift or any of the VBAS officers. Jeff is listed at the AL website as Messier certificate holder number 2363. Congratulations, Jeff!



*President Michael Cowger presents Jeff Delmas
with a Messier Certificate*

Dark-Sky

International Dark Sky Park Community Project

Light pollution wastes money, destroys the natural habitat for nocturnal wildlife, interferes with celestial observations, and increases hazards to drivers and aviators. You can make a difference.

The North Alabama Sierra Club Executive Committee voted to support the International Dark Sky Park initiative (IDSP) at the Thursday Sept 27, 2007 board meeting. IDSP is a community improvement project to save energy (money) by reducing light pollution. The Von Braun Astronomical Society (VBAS) and other organizations are helping the Monte Sano State Park to earn the community the IDSP award from the International Dark-sky Association. The goal of IDSP project is aligned with the North Alabama Sierra Club goals of improving the environment for humans, plants, and wildlife, and conserving natural resources.

Currently our skies only qualify for the bronze level IDSP award, but with the North Alabama Sierra Club members' help we can reclaim our view of the night sky and go for the gold! Gold skies mean more gold in your pocket by saving energy. Whether it is tax dollars, consumer dollars, or private dollars, you can save money by eliminating light pollution.

Any light emitted above horizontal is wasted money, and it pollutes the sky with sky glow, which makes it difficult for VBAS to inspire the youth of the community to explore space, because they can't see the stars.

Light pollution that directly enters the eye is a safety and security hazard called glare. Glare contains

no useful information about the world around us, and since it is much stronger than the useful reflected light, glare prevents us from seeing. Glare impacts drivers by making it difficult to see both during and after the exposure since the eyes do not recover quickly at night. Glare and excessive light decrease security by making it difficult to see into darker areas.

The North Alabama Sierra Clubs members and other concerned citizens can show their support for the IDSP project by:

- a) Converting outdoor lights around their homes to fully-shielded, minimum wattage, only on when needed light fixtures (Fully-shielded lighting needs a little more than half the wattage to produce the same level of illumination.)
- b) Encouraging others to do the same by spreading the word about the IDSP project
- c) Encouraging businesses and government officials to participate in the IDSP project to improve the community by eliminating light pollution

To find out more, please visit the International Dark-sky Association web site: www.darksky.org

First International Dark Sky Reserve Is Announced in Québec!

by Richard Norman

A Reserve is different than a park because it must cover a large area, and include multiple municipalities, and land owners. The core of the area must meet the dark sky criteria for eliminating light pollution, while the outer area must provide restrictions on new lighting, and other measures for promoting responsible outdoor lighting. The core of

the new 5,500 square kilometer reserve in Québec Province, Canada is the Mont-Mégantic National Park. The IDSR award is granted by the International Dark-Sky Association, and more information can be found on the IDA web site:

<http://www.darksky.org/news/press-2007-09-21.php>

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 have been renewed until March 2008. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Jared Cassidy.

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, Jared Cassidy, at 539-4392, or jared@harc.net, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor