



## VBAS Highlights for February

### Public Programs for February

Our next member’s meeting will be held on Friday, February 15th at 7 p.m. Dr. Jonathan Campbell will present his lecture entitled *Impact: Imperative: Protecting the Earth from Hazardous Asteroids, Meteoroids, and Comets*. 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.

Regular planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. This month, we continue a year-long series on the planets and other bodies of our Solar System with three family-friendly shows on Venus, on February 2nd, 9th, and 23rd. David Hood will present a technical show about the Chandra X-Ray Telescope on the 16th. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$5.00 for Adults, \$3.00 for Students, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

### President’s Message

President Michael Cowger gives a State of the Society on page 2.

### A Reminder to Renew

On page 6, Sara Neale explains how to renew your dues for the coming year.

### Jeff Delmas Issues a Challenge

On page 7, learn about Jeff’s plans to match your donations to help us build our facilities expansion.

### Spring Messier Marathon Set for May 2nd

Jeff Delmas discusses our Spring Messier Marathon on page 7, along with the reasons why he chose that date.

### Facilities Enhancement Donation Sheet

For your convenience, there is a pre-addressed form attached to this newsletter, which makes it easy to donate money for the upcoming addition to our facilities.

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



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## President's Message

by Michael Cowger

I'd like to welcome all of our new members who have joined over the past couple of months, and thank all of our members who have been involved with recent programs that encouraged so many to join!

Last year, our members helped with several sidewalk astronomy events held around town. We held our annual Astronomy Day event, presented several programs in our planetarium, and helped visitors and fellow members to enjoy viewing the night skies!

We also began to modify our website, and implemented many new features, such as our non-member email list, for people who want to know when we are presenting programs. It now numbers over 100 email addresses! We have also seen a return of many past members who now receive a weekly email message to remind them of upcoming events.

This year, our members are already presenting planetarium programs and viewing opportunities for the public, as well as fellow members, every Saturday night at 7:30 PM, and I would encourage our members to take advantage of their free admission to these programs.

Three of the Saturday night programs each month are designed for families and those new to astronomy, and may be repeats. At least one of the Saturday night programs will be for those interested in learning about astronomy in greater detail, similar to the programs at our Members' Meetings held on the third Friday of each month. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky after these programs.

For our new members who are looking for ways to get involved and learn about astronomy, I would encourage you to come help out at these programs, because it's amazing how much you can learn by just being around fellow members as they share their excitement

and astronomy knowledge with our visitors and other members.

This Spring, we plan on having a number of workshops to help those who may be interested in learning how to operate our 16" telescope to help with Saturday night programs, our 14" telescope to help with Sidewalk Astronomy events in the area, or our planetarium to help with Saturday night and special group programs.

We are also planning to host an all-night Messier Marathon this Spring and will be posting the details soon on our website at [www.vbas.org](http://www.vbas.org).

Last year, we transitioned from members paying their annual dues based on when they joined, to March 1st of each year, which means that we all need to send in our dues this month, except for our lifetime members.

As President of our society since July of last year, it has been my pleasure to help nurture our recent changes based on input from our members, and to help support many of our fellow members' efforts to make our society what it is today! I hope that you will continue to be a part of our society this coming year by renewing your membership this month!

Michael Cowger

President

Von Braun Astronomical Society

# The Night Sky for February, 2008

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid February, 2008, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Mars, the spear-and-shield symbol, will be almost straight overhead, between Gemini and Auriga. Jupiter, the “h”-like symbol, is rising in the east with Leo. The Moon will be in Taurus.

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



## VBAS Calendar of Events

Saturday, February 2nd, 9th, and 23rd, 2008, 7:30 PM

**Planetarium Show: Venus - Goddess of Love**  
Known for its beauty, Venus shines as the brightest object in the sky, after the sun and moon. During the "Golden Age of Science Fiction" in the 1930's and 40's, Venus was a frequent setting for space adventure stories. Readers and writers alike fancied Venus as an enticing safari planet -- a steaming world-wide jungle filled with unknown and exotic creatures. At first glance, if Earth had a twin, it would be Venus. Its similar size and composition have caused it to be called a "sister" to Earth. While Venus is a wonderful planet to look at, you wouldn't want to live there! Venus is one of the most hostile environments in the solar system. A noxious atmosphere, hellish temperatures, and crushing surface pressure make Mars and the Moon seem delightful by comparison. Thick clouds hide a surface covered with lava flows, quake faults, and impact craters. Come visit the Von Braun Astronomical Society's planetarium and learn all about the planet Venus.



A radar image of the surface of Venus collected by the Magellan spacecraft in 1990. (Image credit: NASA)

Tuesday, February 5th, 2008, 8 PM

### Night Sky Network Telecon at the Planetarium

GLOBE will be talking about their upcoming star count event, and other initiatives for dark skies. They will present things that clubs, classrooms, and individuals can do to get the word out about light pollution.

Friday, February 8th, 2008, 6:30 PM

### Quarterly VBAS Program Committee Meeting

Presented by John Young

Location: West End Grill in Madison

Come to the West End Grill in Madison, to help John brainstorm interesting programs for VBAS members meetings. The West End Grill is at 6610 Old Madison Pike, which is near the Research Pkwy intersection. Their number is 722-8040. If you have any questions, please contact John Young on his cell phone at 797-6038, or via email at [jgy71@knology.net](mailto:jgy71@knology.net).

Friday, February 15th, 2008, 7:00 PM

### Regular Monthly Meeting

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet, we'll discuss pertinent society business. Visitors are welcome.

For the program, Dr. Jonathan Campbell will present his lecture entitled Impact Imperative: Protecting the Earth from Hazardous Asteroids, Meteoroids, and Comets. Lunar meteoroid impact observations and computational fluid dynamics simulations have shown that relatively small objects (asteroids, meteoroids, comets) impacting the Earth at hypervelocity may cause large scale disasters. From fossil records and other supporting evidence, impacts and associated disasters have occurred several times in the Earth's past.

Detection capabilities are improving gradually; however, we are still years away from finding and cataloging all large PHOs. Given the length of time necessary to develop capabilities in space, it is imperative that we begin immediately to build a multi-layered infrastructure to protect the Earth against impact. This challenge to our global civilization's continued existence must be met. This is the IMPACT IMPERATIVE.

Saturday, February 16th, 2008, 7:30 PM

**Planetarium Show: Chandra**

Presented by David Hood

Hidden from the view of a stargazer on Earth, x-rays that reveal the most violent events in the cosmos find sharp focus with the Chandra X-ray Observatory. Sent into orbit in July 1999, Chandra has electrified astronomy with discoveries about the nature of black holes, the formation of galaxies, and the life cycles of stars, quasars and, above all, dark matter. X-rays, unlike visible light rays, are rarely observed and difficult to catch and Chandra captures its X-rays with barrel-shaped mirrors unlike anything on a telescope that studies visible light.



Chandra is a sophisticated instrument that represents a tremendous technological advance in X-ray astronomy and is the largest payload ever launched using the Space Shuttle. Join David Hood from the Chandra Program Office as he describes the telescope and the role MSFC played from the definition studies of the telescope in the 1970's through the manufacturing, on-orbit checkout and management of this unique telescope.

Monday, February 25th through Saturday, March 8th, 2008

**GLOBE Worldwide Star Count**

Another chance to help measure and document the scope of the light pollution problem. Participation will qualify VBAS for a chance to win a sky-brightness meter. To learn more about the star count and to record your observations visit the [GLOBE web site](#).

Saturday, March 1st, 2008

**Membership Renewal Fees Due**

Please send in your membership renewal fees by this date, to remain a member in good standing.

Saturday, March 29th, 2008, 8-9 PM

**Lights Out America Event**

Wherever in the world you are on Saturday, March, 29th, join Americans as they turn off nonessential lights in their hometowns between 8-9 p.m. This is an event of [Lights Out America](#) supported by IDA.

Friday, May 2nd, 2008, *After Dark*

**Spring Messier Marathon**

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

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Greetings VBAS members,

It's that time of year again- almost! Yes, tax season is right around the corner, but before that, your VBAS membership fees come due in March!

On March 1, all VBAS memberships will expire. 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 week-ends!

To become a member or renew your membership:

- Go to [www.vbas.org](http://www.vbas.org),
  - Click the "About Us" tab
  - Click "Join VBAS."
  - Fill out the application and send a check to 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

As an all volunteer organization, VBAS counts on your dues and donations to keep running. You

## Jeff Delmas Issues a Challenge

At January's meeting, Jeff Delmas outlined plans to raise \$10,000 through fundraising efforts to be used for the facilities addition approved by the VBAS board. To launch the fundraising effort, Delmas challenged VBAS members to contribute toward the effort by pledging that he will match the first \$500 in

donations. Please consider a generous donation for the new addition – don't let Jeff keep any of that \$500! A poster board displaying progress toward the overall goal will be displayed in the planetarium in the coming weeks for all to monitor progress.

## Spring Messier Marathon Set for May 2nd

by Jeff Delmas

We've set our Spring Messier Marathon observing event for Friday, May 2, 2008. The Moon will rise at 3:50 am, so we'll have plenty of dark skies. If the weather is bad, we'll try again on May 3rd.

We're avoiding the new Moon period for April due to three regional observing events that some of our members may want to attend. Those events are:

1. Mid-South Star Gaze.....April 2-5  
French Camp, MS
2. Tennessee Spring Star Party..... April 4-6  
Fall Creek Falls State Park  
Pikeville, TN
3. Georgia Sky View..... April 4-6  
Indian Springs State Park  
Jackson, GA

No events in our region are scheduled for May. Some members may gather on Friday April 4th for an informal observing session. Please join the [observers@vbas.org](mailto:observers@vbas.org) email group to keep up-to-date with informal observing sessions. Until we get a place set up on the VBAS web site to register, please ask an officer to make sure you're added to the observers email group.

### 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 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](mailto:jared@harc.net), to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

### 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



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

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We are trying to limit the paper copies we generate, to save costs, clutter, and a lot of work for everyone. If you would like to receive your newsletter electronically, please send your email address to [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org), and let me know.

Steve Sloan, *Via Stellaris* editor

## Facilities Addition Fundraising Goal Set At \$10,000

by Jeff Delmas

One of our near-term goals at the Von Braun Astronomical Society is to add to our planetarium building. We particularly need adequate restroom facilities. Our ability to offer visitors a unique and enjoyable experience will be greatly enhanced with the addition. The current facility is a single unisex restroom that was built in 1957 and is not handicap accessible. Daytime planetarium programs for school children are particularly limited by the current restroom.

We are happy to report that we're nearing another important milestone in the process. Our architect, Gerry Simpson, recently completed the project plans and specifications, which have now gone out to several potential contractors. The VBAS board of directors will soon be reviewing contractor proposals and making a selection for a contractor. Construction will begin shortly thereafter.

Our planned facilities improvements will cost about \$50,000-\$70,000. The money for the addition will come from a combination of government, private, and VBAS resources. We currently have about \$47,000 set aside for the project and have set a goal of raising \$10,000 through private donations to help meet the total cost of the project.

Please consider making a contribution to this very important effort. Your donation is 100% tax deductible.

Jeff Delmas  
Past-President and Fundraising Coordinator

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Yes, I'd like to help!

Enclosed is my check for facilities improvements at the VBAS Planetarium for:

\$25.00    \$50.00    \$100.00    \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you a VBAS Member? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

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Please make checks payable to VBAS. You can tape your check to this sheet and tri-fold this page and our address is on the back. Or enclose this page in an envelope and return to:

VBAS  
P.O. Box 1142  
Huntsville, AL 35807

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FACILITIES ADDITION DONATION

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Place  
Stamp  
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