

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, December 9, 2009, Meeting

In attendance:

- Barton Billard
- Jim Baker
- Don Clark
- Brenda Conway
- Sherry and Joe Francis
- Leigh Gettier
- Rachel and Brad Herzog with Rachel's friend
- Glenn Holiday
- Mike Masters
- Tim Plunkett

Vice President Mike Masters opened the meeting at 7 p.m. with introductions around the room. He suggested sharing an astronomy-related Christmas wish, and for January's meeting an astronomy resolution. Ten members and three visitors were present. Mike proposed that we start introductions at 6:45 in the future because of the limited time the meeting room is available.

Treasurer's Report

Mike started the presentation of the Treasurer's report for November 30, 2009, and Tim Plunkett picked it up when he arrived shortly thereafter. The Club has 27 paid members as of the end of November, and a few dues payments for 2010 have arrived.

Business Meeting

Star party report—All the Club star party dates for October and November saw unfavorable weather that forced cancellations. Weather forecasts for the December 12 date (near the Geminid meteor shower peak) were also poor.

Mike discussed the Pizza Hut meeting room closure that resulted in the return to the Rappahannock Regional Library for Club meetings. The closure is permanent. Pizza Hut's lease ran out and the cost per square foot was too high for them to take a new lease. Mike was able to reserve the larger Library meeting room next year except for April, May, and October. In May, only the smaller room the Club once used is available. No rooms are available for the other two months. In November, the Club will need a location that serves food to continue the tradition for the annual election of officers meeting. Mike asked the members' reaction to holding the May meeting at Stafford Courthouse and the April and October meetings at the Salem Church Library branch where the Club has tentative reservations. No objections were expressed. Someone asked about University of Mary Washington as another potential venue. Mike said that the problem has been finding the right contact to discuss the possibility.

The next item was adjustment of the Club picnic date and two star party dates. Mike had a conflict with the picnic date, and Caledon had conflicts with the November and December dates. The members present favored moving the picnic to August 7. At first, there were no objections to moving the November and December star parties a week earlier, but one member pointed out Thanksgiving weekend falls the week before the December date. Instead, members agreed with Don Clark's suggestion to try a Friday star party on December 3.

Ryan Evers, the new naturalist at Westmoreland, contacted the Club with a request for support for two summer events. Mike suggested two first quarter moon weekend evenings: June 19 and July 17. Mike Masters, Joe Francis, and Bart Billard indicated willingness to go. Mike said he would offer those two dates.

Don Clark has the Club solar telescope. Tim has the equatorial reflector telescope but does not yet have the refurbished controls from Scott. Brenda brought the Club Dob with her to the meeting and arranged to pass it on to Rachel and Brad Hertzog.

Mike reported that David Abbou has volunteered as school lecturer for the Club. He said that Myron Wasiuta has scheduled a public outreach event at Curtis Memorial Park on May 22, and encouraged members to participate.

Mike presented a list of program topics for the next year. In January, Club members are asked to bring grab-and-go telescopes, tripods, or other favorite accessories to talk about. In February, Mike is volunteering to talk about "Outfitting the Compleat Observer." Bob Taylor will talk about Radio Astronomy and SETI in March. Myron will give a program on variable stars in April, and Scott will do a repeat of "Webcam Astrophotography" in May. Brenda has volunteered to talk about "Planet Mercury" in June. Myron will discuss "Exploring the Moon" in July. For August, Mike suggested making the Club picnic the meeting with no program requirement. Scott will repeat his "Advanced Astrophotography" in September. Mike will talk about "Measuring the Universe" in October. For the November election meeting, Joe agreed to talk about black holes. In December, Glenn will discuss star hopping. Mike also showed a list of additional topics that could be used for future programs.

Mike gave a brief demonstration of the Club website, showing, for example, the news links available. His favorite is one for the CERN Large Hadron Collider, the huge particle accelerator near Geneva that is involved in the search for the "Higgs boson," a possible link between relativity and quantum mechanics. Another link is "The Evening Sky Map" that provides a downloadable PDF map for the current month. It fits on a single sheet, front and back showing the way the sky appears on the front with a list of objects on the back.

The meeting ended with an astronomy news discussion. Topics included the NASA Kepler space telescope mission to search for transits of planets as small as Earth's size, Mercury's next greatest elongation on December 18, and a Bogen Gearhead mount Leigh is considering for his new grab-and-go scope.

Next Meeting

The next meeting date is January 13, 2009, 7:00 p.m., at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg. We will begin introductions about 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary