

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

## Minutes, July 14, 2010, Meeting

In attendance:

- Ann Aleo
- Jim Baker
- Barton Billard
- Scott Busby
- Don Clark
- Tracy Deitz
- Joe and Sherry Francis
- Glenn Holliday
- Donna Martinelli
- Mike Masters
- Bruce Mehanes
- Dagmar Ransdorf
- Arden Sellgren
- Jim Ward

President Mike Masters opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m after introductions. Eight members and 7 visitors attended. One of the visitors became a member that evening.

## Program

Mike Masters gave the program this evening. It is the first of two parts on “Measuring the Universe.” He said the idea originally occurred to him one night when he was observing objects in the constellation Cepheus and decided he needed to include a variable star. The star he chose happened to be  $\delta$  Cep, which is the first of a variable star type that became important in measuring the distance of galaxies.

In the first part, Mike covered the role of astronomy in determining the seasons and making calendars, the invention of astronomy by the Greeks, and measuring the solar system. The next part will cover the expanding universe. He said he would post a copy of the presentation on the Club website after he presents part 2. A more detailed summary will accompany the post.

## Treasurer’s Report

Tim Plunkett sent the report for June 30, 2010, which Mike presented because Tim had to be away on travel the day of the meeting. Tim received two dues payments in June, including dues from a new member, Ranny Heflin.

## Old Business

- **Club assets**—Joe took the Club’s most recent acquisition, the Orion 6-inch Dobsonian, to the June outreach at Westmoreland. He helped Ranny Heflin set it up and collimate it. The telescope performed well, and they were able to see two of Saturn’s moons. The Club’s 8-inch Dobsonian was returned this evening. We still need custodians for the 6- and 8-inch Dobsonians. Mike bought five copies of *Discover the Stars* to complete packages for the loaner telescopes, including Moon maps, planispheres, and red flashlights that he donated.
- **Star party and event reports**—Weather forced cancellation of the planned event at Milam Gap, although a few members may have chanced the trip. Weather also interfered with plans for the outreach event at Conway Elementary on June 14. The June 17 outreach event at Westmoreland State Park was successful. Joe reported that a large number of guests staying at the Park came by for views through the telescopes, and the Park people were very helpful and supportive. Viewing started before dark with the Moon and Venus. Scott said he stayed the longest and was able to image Jupiter in the early morning hours. The July 10 Caledon star party was also a no-go.
- **Next star party and other events**—The next Westmoreland outreach is July 17, but the weather forecast is not promising. Mike raised the question of timing of the decision to cancel an event. Currently he tries to make the call at noon on the day of the event. Glenn said that he checked at

Caledon on the 10th and found some visitors and a group of Scouts came without checking the Club website for status. He asked whether the timing of the decision is more important for Club members or visitors. August 7 is the date of the Club picnic at Caledon. Mike said it will start at 5:00 pm and will include a short meeting. A canvas of those present indicated 9–10 planning to attend. Mike will do an e-mail canvas, too, looking for volunteers to take side dishes. He plans to take the hot dogs and hamburgers. The Caledon backup star party date is August 14. Mike requested a volunteer as point of contact, and Glenn said he thought he would be able to do it and would confirm.

- **Sky and Telescope subscriptions**—Tim was not present to give the status. Mike told a member who had taken advantage of a special offer that he could still give Tim the subscription number information to help qualify the Club for the discount.
- **Loaner equipment upgrades**—Joe's computer was down so he has not been able to complete an inventory spreadsheet. He still needs custodians' inputs with the items included and descriptions, along with suggestions for upgrades. Don made some suggestions of suitable tripods for the solar telescope and the Celestron Newtonian.
- **Astronomical League membership**—The poll results favor Club membership with optional individual memberships for those who wish to pay. One suggestion was for the Club to partially subsidize the individual membership costs. We still need a replacement for Mark Slade as Club POC.

## New Business

- Joe submitted a special use permit request to Shenandoah Park for holding Club star parties as sanctioned events. He said the Assistant Director wants to discuss our request, but that they traded telephone messages and have not been able to talk yet. The application asks for a site with a 50-foot by 200-foot area and permission to park vehicles on site. He indicated there may be some requirements we would have to meet (e.g., liability insurance). Mike said the Astronomical League has an umbrella insurance arrangement. He has inquired, but the response suggests the League may not be fully satisfied with the insurance company currently providing the coverage.
- Don described the Night Sky Network for astronomy clubs. Joining would allow our Club to be on their map with publicity for our events. It also provides some tools members might use, such as materials to use for programs. Don moved, seconded by Joe, for the Club to join, with Don the point of contact and Mike the alternate. The motion passed on a show of hands.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting is the Club picnic, August 7, 2010, 5:00 p.m., at Caledon.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary