

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

## Minutes, Jun 17, 2015, Meeting

In attendance:

Dave Algert  
David Abbou  
Bart & Linda Billard  
Don Clark  
Ron Henke

Glenn Holliday  
Jerry Hubbell  
Scott Lansdale  
Lauren Nicholson  
Tom Watson

President Ron Henke called the meeting to order shortly after 7 p.m. Ten members and a visitor were present. The program was deferred to the end of the business meeting to allow more time to set up the equipment for it.

## Program

David Abbou presented a program on his experience with astronomy outreach and serving as a NASA solar system ambassador. His interest in astronomy got started in 1972 as a result of the Apollo program. He has been a NASA Solar System Ambassador since 2008, and he started writing a monthly astronomy column for the *Free Lance-Star* the year before. His telescope is a vintage orange 8-inch Celestron.

David did his first outreach in 1999 at his daughter's elementary school and has been asked back every year. He now does about one outreach a month during the school year, either giving a presentation indoors or holding a star party, and acts as a representative of both NASA and RAC.

David described the NASA Solar System Ambassador program, showing us its website has a map with markers for volunteers. People can click on a marker in their area to get a page about a nearby volunteer. David showed us the page for him. He is one of 628 Ambassadors in the 50 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. NASA accepts applications once a year in September.

Ron asked whether he would be happy to have someone else in our area sign up. David noted he is the only volunteer in north central Virginia, so more would be welcome. Volunteers must be willing to conduct at least four events per year and log them on the website. Benefits include materials for conducting outreach events and participation in teleconferences in which volunteers can talk with astronomers, scientists, and engineers and ask questions. Of course, outreach events also provide the benefit of opportunities to talk about astronomy. At the end of his presentation, David passed out New Horizon Mission DVDs, an example of outreach materials available to volunteers.

Jerry Hubbell also gave a demonstration of a potential new astronomy product he was working on.

## Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Tim noted he missed last month's meeting, so no dues payments were recorded in the report for May, and there was no change in the balance. The club currently has 16 paid memberships this year and 1 paid through 2016. Tim also explained that one could make dues payments to him at meetings, or go to the club website and follow the "Join" link for instructions and a downloadable form with the address to send it with the payment to him.
- Public Outreach Event for England Run Library—Scott Lansdale reported Tom Watson, Ron Henke, Don Clark, Bart Billard, and Glenn Holliday and his wife were there with him and his wife for the outreach event on June 6. Some 60–70 people stopped by to see several telescopes club members had set up as well as the talks on astronomy. Glenn played Thomas Digges in costume, and he had quite a few kids bunched around his meteorites. Ron suggested the event was too long and that June was not a good month to have the event, but Scott thought 2 hours was short given the setup time. Dave Algert said he found out about us through the event and noted he had been checking the *Weekend* section of the *Free Lance-Star* on Thursdays looking for local amateur astronomy events. He also suggested shorter talks that could be repeated might be a good idea. Scott said he had had the impression that the Library's publicity would be good enough. We discussed *Weekend* section

announcements, which we have used in the past, and concluded resuming them would be a good idea for star parties and outreach events. Ron expressed his appreciation for Scott's efforts in organizing the outreach, and Linda Billard said she had told him he'd make a good meeting planner.

- Update on the next Newsletter Status—Linda said she is still interested in articles for the next newsletter. She expected to have one on the England Run event and perhaps one on the Mall event, weather permitting. Scott said he has some of the original (90's) newsletters we could scan in and add to the archives on the club website. He was going to attend the upcoming radio astronomy conference and could write something about it. Linda said she was also looking for an article from Bart, and asked Glenn for something on the Renaissance Faire.
- Renaissance Faire Report—Glenn said he handed out about a dozen cards and club brochures and talked about star party dates. He said he was planning to go back next year, and that the Faire looks for participation with educational aspects like that.
- Communications Committee—Glenn said the website has been running fine. He thought the communications committee should consider whether we need a schedule for backups.
- Solar Telescope Purchase Option—We briefly discussed this purchase idea. Jerry suggested that a larger telescope than the club Personal Solar Telescope can show more details.

## **New Business and Astronomy News**

- Club Picnic—Ron said the picnic would be on August 8 at Scott Busby's place and the format would be the same as last year. He said there would be more details at next month's meeting.
- Astronomy on the Mall—The weather forecast was not promising for Friday. Assuming it takes place, Ron said setup would be 4–6 p.m., and observing would be 6–11 p.m. The rain date would be June 20 at Catholic University (watch the website). Ron said he told the organizer (Bob Moore?) we planned to have between three and five telescopes. He also said he declined a request for club members to help with setup, given the distance we would be travelling. Members who would not be able to go early could still help out later. Those going early should meet at Stafford Marketplace at 2 p.m.
- Support or Awards for Science Fairs—Ron said he thought the University of Mary Washington STEM event might be the most interesting. He mentioned concerns about “playing favorites” if we were to pick one of the several area school districts, and also about whether there would be an appropriate astronomy-related entry. Scott suggested we might offer to mentor a student who wanted to do an astronomy-related project. Glenn said he has not seen cause to worry so much: the Navy has done a prize contingent on a suitable entry a number of times. Lauren suggested we need not be specific about what the prize is and could make it dependent on what the selected entry is.
- Additional Discussion for England Run Event—Scott said he wanted to email people about the England Run outreach event and have an announcement on the club website. The “Don't Miss” item seemed appropriate, and he agreed to send details to Linda who would do the editing and modify the website, including a post encouraging attendance.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is on Wednesday, July 15, 2015, at the Central Rappahannock Heritage Center.