

# RVAS NEWSLETTER



Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society (RVAS)  
News About Amateur Astronomy  
In Southwestern Virginia



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December 2006

## FRANK BARATTA WINS AWARD

*From Tom Clarke  
Roanoke City Parks and Rec.*

Over 1200 delegates from around the state gathered on November 4-7, at the 52nd Annual Conference of the Virginia Recreation and Park Society at [www.vrps.com](http://www.vrps.com) held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center. The conference is a learning exchange and provides an opportunity for recreation and park professionals to discuss areas of common interest. Highlighting each year's conference is a formal presentation of awards. This state-wide program honors individuals, departments and organizations throughout Virginia who have demonstrated excellence in any of several areas during the previous year. Over one hundred applications were received vying for awards in 14 different categories. Judged by a jury of its peers, Frank Baratta, was selected as one of two individuals in the Commonwealth of Virginia to receive the Distinguished Volunteer Service Award – 2005.

Roanoke Parks and Recreation

Astronomy Extravaganza programs are consistently full and receive our highest evaluation scores. Since 1991, our Outdoor Volunteer Instructor, Frank Baratta, has set up several powerful telescopes and has provided a 2 hour celestial treat that takes 20 participants on an extended tour through the Milky Way and beyond. Each person gets an opportunity to be up close and personal with our own moon, then they can travel to bright, gaseous nebulas, peer deep into black holes and stare in wonder at globular clusters located in galaxies far away. Stories are told of Greek Gods, their battles and their loves, and how each constellation above tells a tale of another one that's millions of light years away. Interactive displays with hands-on demonstrations showing galactic times and distances help us understand our place in the solar system and how we, here on Earth, fit into the big picture. All of these facts and figures are overwhelming, yet when told in a simple manner, opens the night sky so that all of the participants, ages 8 to 80 can understand. Through his efforts, he has made the night sky come alive in our minds and in our hearts. He has taken novices

and shown them the rings of Saturn for the first time. He has taken a basketball, a flashlight, marbles and some string and made the science of space, including astrophysics, calculus and geometry simple, fun and easy to understand. And he has shown us how time and light brings history together at the blink of an eye ("There is a summer constellation, 'Cygnus, the Swan' which is also called the 'Northern Cross'. In that constellation, is the star 'Deneb'. The light that we can see this evening from that distant star was emitted when Jesus walked on earth ... and it just reached our planet and eyes tonight"). Frank is a member of the Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society, the leading astronomy authority in Southwest Virginia. Through his passion and experience he has provided astronomy education to over 2,000 participants in the past 14 years!

For more information about Roanoke Parks and Recreation's programs contact us at (540) 853-2236.





## MYSTERY OBJECT

Look to the chariot to find this dim object.

Send your best guess to Dave Thomas, our Mystery Object Columnist, at

thomasde-ka8inl@worldnet.att.net

## RVAS OCTOBER MEETING MINUTES

By Mark Hodges - RVAS Secretary

No minutes from the November Meeting

## RVAS "NAME THE NEWSLETTER" COMPETITION

The RVAS "Name the Newsletter" contest was cancelled due to, both, a lack of interest in entering the contest by the membership, and a lack of interest in judging the contest by the Executive Board. Thanks to Dave Thomas from Lynchburg for taking the time to enter the contest. ✦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### TRI-STAR STARQUEST - GUILFORD, NC - MARCH 3, 2007

The Tri-Star Star Quest is an astronomy event held at Guilford Technical Community College. This is a very nice event that is held by the Greensboro Astronomy Club. The details have not been finalized yet, but RVAS members should consider attending this event. For more information as it becomes available, go to: <http://technet.gtcc.cc.nc.us/comserv/cline/tristar.htm>

## ASTRO-QUIZ

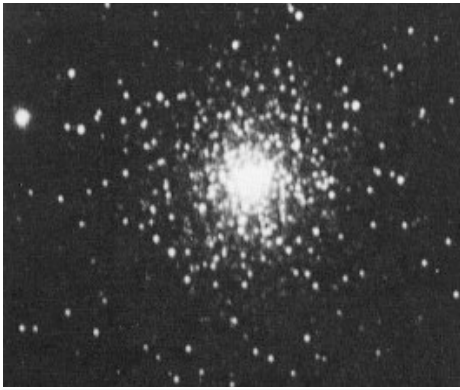
What two galaxies are the closest to our galaxy, the Milky Way?

Answer to Last Month's Astro-Quiz: The history of celestial mapmaking contains many constellations, all but 88 of which were rendered obsolete when these were standardized by the International Astronomical Union in 1922. Among those no longer recognized is Quadrans Muralis, introduced by the Frenchman J.J. Lalande (1732–1807). It is remembered for an annual meteor shower, the Quadrantids, which appear to radiate from where this constellation used to be. (It's now in Boötes.) The Quadrantids are seen from the 1st through the 5th of January, peaking on the 3rd or 4th. The parent body of the Quadrantids is believed to be an asteroid (2003 EH1), which may also be the comet C/1490 Y1 observed by the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans 500 years ago.

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society is a membership organization of amateur astronomers dedicated to the pursuit of observational and photographic activities. Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, Virginia. Meetings are open to the public. Observing sessions are held one or two weekends a month at a dark-sky site. Yearly individual dues are \$20.00. Family membership is \$25.00; student membership is \$10.00. For information, call the RVAS Message Line at 540-774-5651. Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS, its editor, officers, or individual members.

**RVAS web page:** <http://www.roavas.org>

**Officers/Executive Committee:** Mike Overacker, President / Newsletter Editor (776-3092); Steve Manuel, Vice President (890-3883); Mark Hodges, Secretary (774-5039); Jeff Suhr, Treasurer / Membership Coordinator (563-0079); Vacant, Executive Committee Member-At-Large; Katherine Hix, Immediate Past President (334-2443); Paul Caffrey, Past President (345-2847); Roger Pommerenke, Webmaster (774-5823)



## LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY OBJECT

Shining at 7.2 magnitude from 26,000 light years distant, is M30 the November Mystery Object.

M30 is located in Capricornus at RA 21h 40m Dec -23 deg 11m. The core of the cluster is very dense and has underwent a core

## MEET THE RVAS MEMBER

By Katherine Hix - RVAS Immediate Past President

**What is (or what are) your main interest(s) in the astronomy field?**

Observing anything that I can find really, learning about how the universe was created-astrophysics, learning about deep space objects and Messier Objects.

**When did you first become interested in astronomy?**

In 5th grade-so 8 years ago.

**Have you taken any classes in the subject?**

I am taking Phys 101 Introduction to Astronomy at Hollins University which is being taught by Dr. Ametepe.

**Do you pursue your interest in astronomy alone, or with friends?**

It has mainly just been me. My dad

is interested as well but he doesn't really go viewing with me. I try to get my friends to go star gazing with me when they have time but that isn't very often.

**Do you have particular books related to astronomy that you really like?**

In my dorm room currently I have "Instant Physics" by Tony Rothman, "Norton's Star Atlas and Reference Handbook," "Night Watch" by Terence Dickinson, and some magazines-"National Geographic: Exploring Space-the Universe in Pictures," Night Sky, Astronomy, and Sky and Telescope. I just enjoy reading about the aspects of the authors, their view on space and the universe. They have really good pictures and the star atlas has tons of information and data so its really useful in learning about the stars and what type they are. Night Watch is good as well because it has useful information such as how to use a telescope, what is in the sky (star charts), how to do astrophotography, and information about planets and stars. It is really good for beginners such as myself.

**What kind of telescope do you own?**

Well it is a Celestron NexStar-80mm diameter, F= 400mm and it is a refractor. I love my scope!

**Have you ever gone on any astronomy-related trips, like star parties, etc.?**

Unfortunately no. College has been keeping me pretty busy, but in the future I do plan on going on them.

**How do you like being in the RVAS?**

I love being in the club...I've learned so much. I've had the opportunity to participate with Astronomy Day downtown that was awesome. But I haven't really participated much with my committee. I'm trying to bring

friends to each meeting.

**Do you observe much?**

I try to observe when I have time-I usually just haul my telescope up to the hill on campus near the stables...it is the darkest spot on campus so its my only choice.

I would love to go viewing near Natural Bridge but then again I haven't been to Cahas Mountain yet. I guess I could say I'm still experimenting.

**Have you done any science projects that related to astronomy or a similar field?**

In 11th grade I did a project that involved telescopes-it involved the history of telescopes and creating a very unique telescope-one that was like the Hubble but had many different types of equipment involved.

**Do you plan to make astronomy part of your career as an adult?**

Well eventually I plan on earning a B.S in Physics and then a Master's in Astrophysics and then possibly a Ph.D...I want to either work for NASA, become a professor, or work for an observatory.

**Can you tell us a bit about yourself?**

Well I am a first year student at Hollins University. I am very interested in archaeology, archaeoastonomy, ancient cultures (Greeks), I collect fossils and geodes. I enjoy horticulture and ornithology, hiking, walking, and traveling, I play piano and violin, and I care about the environment.

I'm not quite sure what I want to do at Hollins...the physics department is lacking so I think I will get a B.A in Classical Studies, and double minoring in Physics and Environmental Studies. I plan to earn a B.S in physics at another institution. At Hollins I am currently becoming involved in the Students for Environmental Action(S.E.A), and Hollins Outdoor Program (HOP). †

# ***Society Events and Activities for December 2006***

**MONTHLY MEETING:** Monday, December 18th, 7:30 p.m. Fifth floor meeting room, Center In The Square, Roanoke. The evening's program will be the RVAS Winter Social. Be sure to come to this meeting and meet with your fellow members. All RVAS members are asked to bring a snack or dessert to this event.

**"MEMBERS ONLY" WEEKEND OBSERVING SESSIONS:** Unless otherwise noted, observing sessions are held at Cahas Mountain Overlook, milepost 139 on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Friday and Saturday, 8th and 9th. Sunset is at 5:02 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 6:35 p.m. The Moon rises at 8:42 and 9:47 p.m., respectively.

Friday and Saturday, 15th and 18th. Sunset is at 5:04 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 6:37 p.m. The Moon sets at 1:39 and 2:05 p.m., respectively.

January Sessions: 12th and 13th; 19th and 20th.

**FRANKLIN CO. PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Dates of 2007 sessions to be determined.

**ROANOKE CITY PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Saturday, December 16th, 5:30 p.m., Cahas Overlook, milepost 139, Blue Ridge Parkway. For City, County and other area residents; RVAS members welcome to participate. Call the RVAS Message Line, 540-774-5651, for information. (Next session: January 13th, 6:00 p.m., Cahas Overlook.)

**RVAS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING:** To be announced.

Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society  
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