

# RVAS NEWSLETTER



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



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January 2007

## RVAS COMMITTEE UPDATES

By Mike Overacker  
RVAS President

The RVAS Committee chairs were asked for a committee update for the start of the New Year. Below are the Updates that I received.

**Scholastic Outreach Committee - Matt Fleenor, Chair** - "Thanks to all RVAS members who attended the first (ever?) student observing outreach at Roanoke College in November. We had over thirty students swing by to peer through the various telescopes and ask questions. Our next student observing outreach at RC is scheduled for January 22 or 23 (weather permitting) at 7:00 pm. After consulting the forecast, I will send an email to all interested parties a few days before with the exact information (time, location, day). Please email me (fleenor@roanoke.edu) if you are interested in attending and bringing your telescope."

**Public Outreach Committee - Mark Hodges, Chair** - We held a public session for the Geminids in December. For next year here is a preliminary schedule for public observing sessions.

All of the major meteor showers will not be hampered by the moon in 2007, especially the Geminids. I am planning on doing the Persids, Leonids and Geminids in 2007. There is the possibility of a comet visible in mid January, but it will be pretty low on the horizon.

There is a total lunar eclipse on March 3rd, we may not see totality but we will see the rest of it as the moon rises.

There is another lunar eclipse on August 28th that we should be able to see but it will occur just before sunrise.

**ARF / Observatory Committee - Paul Caffrey, Chair** - Status of Observatory as of 12/30/2006  
Roof - done (I finished it Wed and Thur afternoon this week).  
Crawl space door - Steve Smith installed it Thur afternoon and we added the lock. Key stored IN the observatory in a drawer.

Solar panel - installed, along with battery controller. Now charging battery.

Facia - 1/4 done.

Soffit screen to keep out wasps and birds/bats - NOT done.

Metal door locks - working on east side. Awaiting install (Cipher) on west side).

Roof track roller stops - NOT done.

Siding - waiting for spring.

Decking - waiting for spring.

Telescopes - awaiting approval for install the telescope.

Committee Update:

Committee met 11/14, committee revised 11/20 to include ARF committee members. Scope and Observatory training and access procedures decided at 11/24 meeting.

**Program Committee - Steve Manuel, Chair** - Our speaker for

January will be Clark Thomas. He will share of his wealth of knowledge on Internet links to some great astronomy sites. He may include some other useful info apart from the links. In February John Goss will speak on light and distances, or something similar. He is building this into a PowerPoint assisted presentation that is certain to be packed with all kinds of helpful and interesting data.

**Hospitality Committee - Vacant, Chair** - Carol Mesimer has resigned the chair of the Hospitality Committee due to personal reasons. Anyone interested in this chair, please contact me immediately. Carol did a great job while she held this position.

**Membership Committee - Issac Campbell, Chair** - Issac has informed me that he is currently building on what has been done with membership issues in the past, and will be working on new ideas in the near future.

**AL Club Committee - Mike Overacker, Chair** - The AL Club committee is currently trying to gather all of the data from the outreach in 2006, and is planning to get some groups together to work on AL clubs in 2007.

**Publicity Committee - John Goss, Chair** - The committee is very busy and will report more in the future.

**Dark Sky Committee - Jeff Wood, Chair** - No Report. ✦



## MYSTERY OBJECT

This "Hole in the Sky" resides in one of the hardest constellations to spell.

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

thomasde-ka8inl@worldnet.att.net

## 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>

### MASON DIXON STAR PARTY - WELLSVILLE, PA - JULY 11 - 15, 2007

The 18th Annual Mason Dixon Star Party is The Star Party for all members of the family. This location offers a flat and level camping /observing area with unlimited space for attendees. This is a Star Party for all members of the family. There will be workshops, speakers, field trips and raffle prizes for all ages. We also have camping areas, bunk houses, food, showers and facilities, horse shoe pits, sand volley ball courts and a swimming pool too!

[www.YCAS.org](http://www.YCAS.org)

<http://www.masondixonstarparty.org/>

## ASTRO-QUIZ

Where in relation to Earth's orbit around the Sun would we find the Moon when it is at its last-quarter phase?

Answer to Last Month's Astro-Quiz: Every day our understanding of the objects we view in the night sky is being rewritten. Where once the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds were thought to be the Milky Way's only companion galaxies, today about a dozen are known, with theory predicting many more to be found. The closest are dwarf bodies, such as the Sagittarius dwarf, which appears to be colliding with the other side of the Milky Way. Next closest is the Canis Major dwarf, which, at a distance of 25,000 light years, is as near as many of the Milky Way's globular clusters. In fact, the Canis Major dwarf may include Messier 79, a globular cluster in the constellation Lepus.

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

December's mystery object, NGC 1931, is an emission and reflection nebula in Auriga. It has been mistaken for a comet because of its appearance.

Located at RA: 5h 31.4m and Dec: +34 deg 15 Min it glows at 11.3 magnitude. A dark sky is necessary to view this object.

## RVAS DECEMBER MEETING MINUTES

*By Mike Good - Acting RVAS Secretary*

Meeting called to order at 7:35 PM by **Mike Overacker**. There were no new members or visitors. Treasurers report was read, and the newsletter naming contest was dropped due to lack of interest. Mike Overacker was presented with the AL Outreach Award. He is number #71 on the AL list. Announced that the Enchanted Eve outreach will take place again on New Years Eve in Vinton. The club asked for volunteers. Observing Reports were called. Mike Overacker had 8 reports. **John Goss** had 2 reports. No other reports were tendered. **Mike Good** updated the membership on the ARF Observatory. Mike Overacker announced that Lynchburg College is building an Observatory in Bedford. The budget for the Bedford Observatory is over \$300,000. **Matt Fleenor**, Scholastic Outreach Chair, announced another outreach event at Roanoke College, scheduled for January 22, 2007. A request was made for people available for Scholastic Outreach, and the Ottowell Calendars that were ordered, were distributed. The meeting then moved on to the social, and was completed at 9:10 PM.

## SO, WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS YEAR?

*By Mike Overacker  
RVAS President*

The RVAS. Our local astronomy club. It is the place that people come when they want to learn about astronomy. It is the place that people contact when they want to know what is going on in the sky. We are the contact point for the Roanoke Area for all things astronomy. For the past few years, this responsibility has fallen onto the heads of a few people in the RVAS. These people have plotted the course of the club, set up the arrangements for club activities, and did all of the work necessary to keep the RVAS functional. But it was burning people out, which is not a good thing, considering that the RVAS was burning out the people who cared enough to actually work towards making it a great club. When I took the reigns of the RVAS, I made changes to put more control of the club into the membership. The committee system was set up for the workload to be spread out

amongst the members, thus, not putting a large burden on anyone and reducing the risk of burnout. This concept was endorsed by a vast majority of the membership that comes to meetings, but we still have far too many members that are not willing to help with the club, and simply want something to do one night a month. There have been several people that have told me that having 10 to 15 percent on the membership involved in the club is what is to be expected from any club. I simply do not buy that. I have been involved with 2 other clubs in recent years. One had almost 100 percent involvement, and the other lagged behind with about 90 percent participation from members. The reason to join these clubs was that you were interested in the club, and you wanted to be involved. People did not join these other clubs so that they could be provided for. The RVAS strikes me as, not so much an astronomy club, then as a country club. You pay the dues,

then come in and sit around, talk, and do nothing. If this is what the membership of the RVAS wants the club to be, by all means, let me know now. But, if the membership wants it to be an astronomy club that does things, helps the community, and provides a place where people of like interests can gather and be involved in astronomy, then it is time for the membership to step up to the plate. There is an average of 730 hours a month. People work and sleep a total average of 330 hours a month. That is 400 hours a month left over. It would be nice if our members could set aside 1 or 2 hours a month, beside the meetings, to be involved with the club. That is asking very little of every member of the RVAS. What can you do? Well, if you are not on a committee, join one. If you are on a committee, work with the chair to get the ball rolling. Will we ever see over 90 percent participation from the RVAS membership? Given the past attitudes, no. However, I sure am willing to try. Are you? ✦

# ***Society Events and Activities for January 2007***

**MONTHLY MEETING:** Monday, January 15th, 7:30 p.m. Fifth floor meeting room, Center In The Square, Roanoke. The evening's program will be Astronomy Websites by Clark Thomas.

**"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, 12th and 13th. Sunset is at 5:24 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 6:56 p.m. The Moon rises at 2:26 and 3:29 a.m., respectively.

Friday and Saturday, 19th and 20th. Sunset is at 5:31 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 7:02 p.m. The Moon sets at 6:09 and 7:24 p.m., respectively.

February Sessions: 9th and 10th; 16th and 17th.

**FRANKLIN CO. PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Next session March 17th, 7:00 p.m.

**ROANOKE CITY PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Saturday, January 13th, 6:00 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: February 10th, 6:30 p.m., Cahas Overlook.)

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

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