

Triton Fun Company

Science Newsletter October 2008

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Fun at our local Astronomy Club

C. Bobchin

Special points of interest:

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I first became interested in astronomy as a hobby, when I was 9 years old and living in suburban New Jersey. It was the early 1970s, and I had always been a science wonk; my parents gave me a 60mm Tasco refractor for either a birthday or holiday present that year, and my fate was sealed.

Every time I took my little scope out and looked up, I was transfixed by what I saw. I dragged out whoever I could to share the views with me, but rarely did anyone join me. I read whatever books and magazines on astronomy I could find, but every object I found was my discovery. I had no one to help me, and no one to talk to about my newfound obsession. Now remember that this was in the days before cell phones, personal computers and the Internet. I had no idea that there were such things as astronomy clubs anywhere around.

Flash forward a few years: I move to Buena Park, California. I had to leave my scope behind, and when I got here I was dismayed by the horrible grey-orange skies with their lack of stars. With the move, and all that came with being a teenager in Southern Cal, I soon stopped regular observing. It would be over 20 years and the gift of another telescope, this time a Meade ETX-105 to get me back into an observing lifestyle.

The difference now is that I was able to do a Google search and locate a group called the Orange County Astronomers, or OCA for short. I went to my first meeting and discovered a large group of like-minded individuals that share the same passion for looking at the sky through pieces of glass that I do.

The OCA was founded in 1967 as the Orange County Astronomical Association. The initial group was small, but quickly grew. In 1972 they incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. At first, the club met in a variety of schools but as the club grew they moved to the Santa Ana Library for a few meetings and finally to the present meeting site at Chapman University.

Our current membership is around 800 people and they are scattered around the country. Membership brings with it a host of benefits. The biggest one is the friendship and camaraderie that comes with belonging to such an organization. The OCA is a very friendly group that is more than happy to share their knowledge and experience with others. Another benefit that members enjoy is unlimited access to our Anza dark sky site and use of the facilities which includes the club's 22" Cassegrain telescope (after appropriate training and when not in use).



Under starry skies..

Our dark sky site has electricity and telescope pads through out the developed section along with wireless internet access. We also have two double-wide trailers stuck end to end with bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom facilities. Having travelled around the country on business for a few years, I had a chance to meet with many clubs from other areas and saw a lot of observing sites. I think OCA's is one of if not the best of those that I've seen.

The OCA is really oriented towards education, and that is what is behind the formation of the club's many Special Interest Groups (SIGS). We have SIGS covering such areas as astrophysics, astro-imaging, robotic/remote telescopes, and Go-to Scopes and a beginner astronomy class that culminates with a "learn how to use your telescope" class twice a year.

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We are always looking for contributors to the Science Newsletter. If you would like to write an article about a science subject you are excited about, or contribute a superfluous question, or if you would like to be on our mailing list for future newsletters, please e-mail us at:

info@tritonfun.com

Local Astronomy Club:

Photos/Info: [South Plains Astronomy Club/Galati star party/NASA/JPL](#)

At this class students of the beginner's class and non-members are encouraged to bring their telescopes with them to a location and experienced club members show them how to use and set up their scopes and how to find objects in the night sky.

Perhaps the most active sub group of the club is our Outreach group. These hardy folks bring their telescopes with them to schools, parks, libraries, and the like and show students, teachers, parents and members of the public the wonders of the night sky. As a very active participant of the outreach group, I have to say that it is one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. We schedule around 50 outreaches throughout the year with our busiest season being during the school year where we may do 2-3 in a week.

Our meetings usually have two main components:

1: A "What's Up" presentation given by one of our members. What's Up, is a look as to what celestial objects are of viewing/imaging interest in the coming month. Each presenter is free to come up with their own style of presentation and topic of interest.

2: A main speaker who gives talks on a variety of astronomical subjects. We've had members speak about projects or astronomical trips they've undertaken, or science that they've been involved with. We frequently have an external speaker come to talk with us. We've had such notables as Shelly Bonus, the great, great, great, great granddaughter of William Herschel, Dr. Mike Brown of Caltech, and many others talk with us.

The monthly meetings are always interesting, and I always learn something new. Check out your local club!

Resources:

<http://www.OCAstronomers.org>



Star parties

Amateur astronomers like to travel to remote, dark sky locations, set up their telescopes and enjoy being under a starry sky. Clubs and individuals are happy to let others look through their telescopes so if you go to a star party or outreach event, you can see the many celestial objects they are viewing at high magnification. Stars, planets, galaxies, nebulae, all look amazingly detailed once you see them through a telescope. In a dark sky location, the sky is usually saturated with stars, they are so bright and so abundant. The view from light-filled cities is no comparison. Get out there and enjoy the night sky. The best way is to join an astronomy club..



Astronomy clubs

It is wonderful to share your love of the sky with other amateur astronomers. A listing of astronomy clubs by state and country can be found at the following website. It is best also to google astronomy clubs since links are not always updated:

<http://www.astronomyclubs.com>

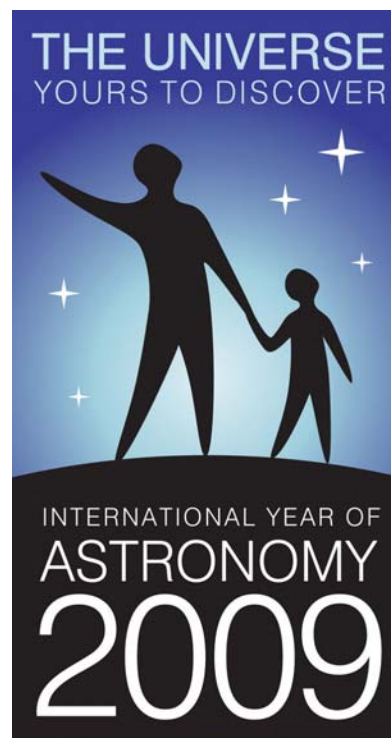
TRITON FUN PRODUCTS

2009 has been declared the "International Year of Astronomy". Events and activities to further the excitement of astronomy are being planned by IYA committees in over 100 countries. The logo for the IYA2009 is shown below. For more info on upcoming IYA2009 events, go to: <http://www.astronomy2009.org>

Triton Fun is an authorized distributor of T-shirts, sweatshirts and long-sleeve tees sporting this new logo. Part of the proceeds from the sale of these shirts will go to support astronomy clubs and astronomy activities connected with IYA2009 in California.

These shirts can be ordered online on our website:
<http://www.tritonfun.com>

Or, order by phone (toll-free) : 800-778-0560



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** Send us your superfluous questions for a future issue ! They can be on any subject. The funnier, the better. M.D., our editor, appreciates the help and will send you a free Triton Fun coffee mug as compensation for your question. Or write an article for us and be read by professional and amateur astronomers and scientists in the U.S. and Canada ! **

Superfluous Questions:

- 1) How many vertebrae are in the human spine ?
a) 27 b) 34 c) 16 d) 45
- 2) In the TV show *Get Smart*, what was the number assigned to Maxwell Smart ?
a) 99 b) 47 c) 86 d) 007
- 3) Astronomers try to observe the "Sunyaev-Zeldovich effect" in galaxy clusters to measure *what* ?
a) neutrinos b) planets c) dark matter d) chocolate
- 4) Where is North Zulch ?
a) Alabama b) Ohio c) Colorado d) Texas

→ ANSWERS in next months issue of the Science Newsletter ! ←---

** ANSWERS to September's Superfluous Questions: 1. c) Trevor 2. a) 1890 3. d) Kohoutek 4. c) Rhea