

Gemini

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Gemini**

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Stories Wanted: Gemini needs your story of how you first became interested in astronomy, what you have done over the years, what equipment you have used, what star parties you have attended in other states, and how you have encouraged others, especially young people, to get involved in this fascinating hobby. Submit your story to: brownreveugene66@gmail.com

E-mail Update: If your e-mail address has changed in the past two years, chances are that the address MAS has for you is not current. We need to be able to communicate with all of our members on a timely basis. Please submit new e-mail addresses to MAS vice president Steve Emert at: lakeaires@msn.com

Editor's Note: On page 10 of the April issue, the name of the author of "Galileo's Children" is incorrect. It should be Dave Tosteson. My apologies to the author.

Winter Star Party 2009

By Russ Durkee

The Winter Star Party (WSP) is the kind of gathering that every astronomer should experience at least once. It takes place in the Florida Keys every year in February. The site is small, overcrowded, and within a few hundred feet of U.S. highway No. 1. Oh yeah, and the skies are not all that dark. It may not sound so great when I put it that way. But on the other hand, where can you rub elbows with the best imagers in the world, alongside some of the finest equipment in the world, under skies with some of the best seeing in the world? The Winter Star Party, that's where!

Daytime Activities

Next to observing, my favorite part of any star party is attending the talks. This year WSP had a really good lineup of speakers. My favorite talk by far was by Andrew Allen, former astronaut and space-shuttle commander. Astronauts are always easy to pick out of a crowd. Or maybe I should say that astronauts are easy to pick out of a crowd of amateur astronomers. Mr. Allen was no exception; he was confident, poised, well spoken, and oh, so good looking. The purpose of his presentation was to describe the physical and emotional experience of traveling in space; this is a part of space travel that always seems to slip through the cracks of history. He mentioned the more common facts about how the body "grows" three inches in space, but he also described how the human body sheds gallons of liquid when it experiences weightlessness. (Microgravity makes you pee.) That was pretty interesting and something I had not heard before. But then he also explained that at the end of the flight astronauts must re-hydrate by drinking gallons of water before de-orbiting. As a result, pilots like him had to be able to land the space shuttle while wearing a huge, soggy diaper. Now that's what I call the right stuff!

I always enjoy seeing Mike Kibat at our own Onan Observatory give visitors guided tours of the Moon. He seems to know the Moon like he has actually been there. But I have a feeling that Dr. Howard Eskildsen's talk about observing unusual lunar features would even teach Mike something new. Most of us think of ol' Luna as a pain in the neck. But Dr. Eskildsen described how to view normally hidden features near the Moon's horizon that are only revealed during favorable librations or when the Moon's wobble is just right. I found his enthusiasm contagious.

Two other talks by professional astronomers were also noteworthy because they came to WSP to recruit help for their projects. Dr. Ron Dilulio of the Uni-



West Summerland Key. Site of the Winter Star Party.

versity of Texas was organizing a collaborative of astronomers to help search for exo-planets using telescopes as small as eight inches in aperture. Dr. James Webb (not the space telescope Dr. Webb) spoke about the Whole Earth Blazar Telescope, which is made up of a consortium of professional and backyard astronomers. See a pattern here? More and more professional astronomers are discovering what the AAVSO and the Center for Backyard Astrophysics (CBA) have known for years: Backyard astronomers are a relatively un-tapped source of scientific data, and we work for even less than graduate students.

I am just scratching the surface here. Other talks by folks from NASA, planet imager Dr. Don Parker, imager Richard Crisp, famous optician Roger Ceragioli, and well-known amateur Alan French made for an informational and inspiring week. But while I enjoy a good presentation, there is nothing like getting out to see the stars.

Observing at WSP

Once sunset arrived, the scopes were uncovered and the real fun began. I did not bring a scope this year, as WSP was just part of my family vacation. Instead, I chose to mooch views from those who were configured for eyeball detectors. Florida seeing is legendary, and their average is better than but a few nights in Minnesota during a given year. The most memorable views for me were through a 20" f/3.3 Dobsonian. That was not a typo. Yes, this scope was a 20" f/3.3. It was made by Mike Lockwood of Lockwood Custom Optics, and I thought it was superb. This was not just a low-power scope, either. The Orion Nebula was jaw-dropping with a hint of deep crimson and great contrast. But the higher-power views were just as impressive. The Eskimo Nebula revealed its folded inner hood and hints of spiky structure. Sirius B (the "Pup") was clearly resolved. If you have ever tried spotting Sirius' companion from Minnesota, you will appreciate what a difficult feat this is. Saturn was just fantastic and seeing limited even at 400x. Mike used a TeleVue Paracorr, and it controlled the coma very well to my eye. I am convinced that large, super-fast scopes are the next big thing in amateur astronomy. We will be seeing more of them in the future, with Mike Lockwood leading the way.

Unlike most Midwest star parties that I have attended, imagers are the norm at WSP. Folks travel from all over the world to catch the southern skies visible from the Florida Keys. I have spent a bit of time observing in the southern hemisphere, and I think it has the most spectacular sights in the night sky. But like everything, location is a trade-

off. Northern observers like us Minnesotans are lucky to have access to a lot of bright spiral galaxies and beautiful planetaries like the Ring Nebula and the Dumbell Nebula. From the southern hemisphere a lot of these objects are near the northern horizon or not visible at all. The southern hemisphere has the incredible Tarantula Nebula and Omega Centauri, a huge globular cluster. In a place like the Keys you have access to all of the North while getting a taste of that spectacular southern hemisphere sky. If you stay up un-



Mike Lockwood's 20" f/3.3, the future of big Dobs.



Astrotech's new \$1,200 6" carbon-fiber Ritchey Astrograph.



A great break from winter In Minnesota.

GEMINI INFO

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2009 Messier Marathon Report

By Bill Kocken, observing chairman

In a last minute change of plans, the Messier Marathon was held at the Onan Observatory instead of at Cherry Grove this year. The change was made because the weather forecast for Cherry Grove indicated that this site would be at the edge of a cloud system for much of the night. The weather at Onan was good, considering that it was April in Minnesota. Transparency at the start of the night was poor but improved to somewhat below average as the night progressed. The cloud bank that covered Cherry Grove to the east and south threatened us at Onan as it advanced and then receded as the night went on. The temperatures were chilly but not frigid. The frost didn't attack until around 4:00 a.m. We had about 25 participants, which is a good turnout considering the sky conditions and last minute change of location.

The bad transparency at the start of the night made the difficult evening objects of M74, M77, M33 and M110 almost impossible. Ken Hugill managed to see M74 using averted imagination. In addition to challenging observing conditions, we all decided that the small tree just to the south of the observing field must go. It got in the way of everyone at some point throughout the night. I gave up at about 4:00 a.m. as Sagittarius was clearing the horizon. Three observers stayed until almost dawn. There were a few others sleeping in their cars at daybreak; a good idea because driving home after staying up all night is not a good thing.

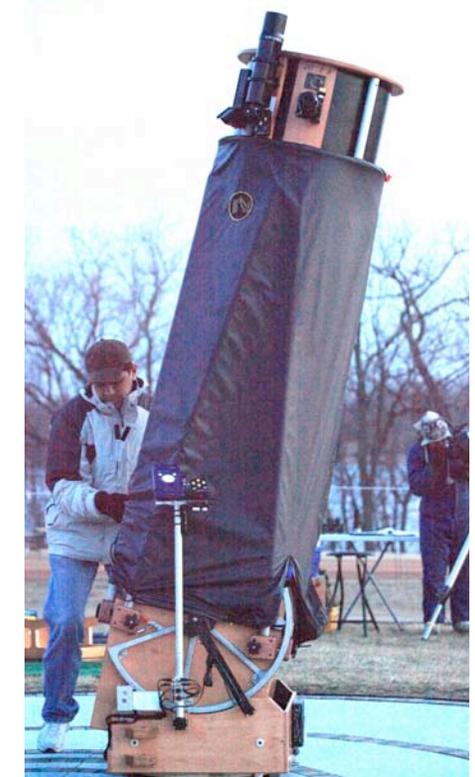
Here are the final results:

Experienced Category	Messier Objects Observed
Jeff Burrows	98
Ken Hugill	90
Bill King	75
Bill Kocken	71
Ashutosh Lotlikar	53
Dave Kocken	44
Tim and Barb Biros	12
Ben Huset	5
Steve Anderson	?
John Poppele	54
John Donohue	38

Inexperienced Category	Messier Objects Observed
Paul Gade & Kathy Sidler	19
Jim Talbot	14
Kris Hultner	13
Byron Day	9
Reed Snyder	8
Corithian	7

I would like to thank everyone for showing up and helping each other out. It was a good display of camaraderie and it made the night enjoyable for everyone. I would also like to thank Father Brown and Ben Huset for taking photos and Merle Hiltner for opening up the observatory and acting as host. I think the 2009 MAS Messier Marathon was a success!

Photographs by Ben Huset and Father Brown. 📷



By Drew Smith, secretary

Advertising

KTCA (PBS) has offered a 15-second ad slot for \$500 during the May astronomy special. The last time we did that we accepted donations that covered it. Motion carried to allocate \$500 and to ask for donations at meetings. We will use the same pictures as last year for the TV slot; Ben will overlay text. We also discussed having local media come out; we will possibly do a press release.

Campout with the Stars

Jon Hickman and Walt Filson are heading up this effort. Motion carried to allow the letter of intent to be approved by Jon and Walt. July 24-26 are the dates. We need to start recruiting for help. Baylor will give the event first crack at all campout space (reserving entire park currently). They will collect all fees and cut MAS a check after the event; fees may vary. REI is willing to promote the event but is unsure on whether they will commit funds/products. Astronomy magazine has not responded yet on advertising. The women who wanted to do a dinner for a fee are willing and available.

Baylor will up-charge beyond their normal fees for what MAS wants. Vehicle entry fees will be waived for the weekend. MAS will purchase some raffle items; Jon is still working on donations. Selling raffle tickets would require MAS to obtain a gambling license; door prizes are exempt. We could offer a discount on patron membership at the event and an entry for a premium prize. Baylor will be promoting their astronomy summer camp a week after Campout with the Stars. They may want MAS to staff the observatory if possible.

Marketing possibilities: schools, planetarium, REI, Northern Lights (scouts), etc. Walt and Merle will start working on a presentation for the barn during the day. Merle needs the information from Jon and Walt to create the event handout

Onan

No responses have been received to Merle's e-mail request last month for Onan fundraising leads. There was discussion around Onan committee composition and terms. Onan upgrades slated: manual winch for roof, DVD storage unit, railing, PA system. Merle created an outreach solar system set and is writing up a manual for training new keyholders.

Continued from on page 2

til the wee hours of the morning and the conditions are good, you just might see the Southern Cross skim the waves. Omega Centauri reaches about 20 degrees above the horizon from the Keys that time of year. Any object this low in the sky would make for a tough target if you were in Minnesota, but not if you have nearly perfect seeing, like an average night in the Florida Keys.

Attending WSP

You have to plan in advance if you want to attend WSP, because tickets are limited to 600 attendees. Tickets are usually sold-out by November. Contact the Southern Cross Astronomical Society early and get on their mailing list before registration opens in October. There are no walk-ins at the Winter Star Party, and it is closed to the general public.

Getting There

There are a few ways to get to WSP. Some folks fly into Miami or Key West and mail their equipment ahead of them, but the

Outreach

Jon and Walt are the current outreach coordinators. We discussed scout groups, scouting astronomy requirements, outreach opportunities and upcoming activities and reviewed Minicon outreach activities. Walt will be reaching out to colleges with astronomy departments or classes.

MAS Web Site

Jon Hickman will be the new administrator; Craig and Reese will probably help. We decided to go with a new host and a new registrar. We discussed: calendar issues and other problems with the current site; outreach items, potential future capabilities of calendars and other forum functions; the possibility of having member pages ala Facebook; potential needs to upgrade the site or the software; expanding the profile page a little further.

The Onan sign-up page is now gone. The events calendar and Onan sign-up calendar need to be integrated. We need to change the calendar color notation from the entire day to the specific events, and we need to discuss what forums should be hidden from viewers not logged in. Ben will get Walt added to the outreach e-mail box to process requests. Jon, Mike, Michael and crew have done a fantastic job on quickly transitioning the MAS Web site from Mike to Jon and moving off of the old clockwork servers. Tom Dantona's Superior Help Desk Services will provide free long-term hosting for MAS.

Other Items

Andy Frasier requested a common grant for Belwin; Bob has filled out the form. We reviewed the common grant application and suggested breakouts to clean up. Andy has received everything he needs to begin Belwin observatory fundraising. The family that attended the Messier Marathon at Onan were told it was a private event; apologies have been sent to the family from the Onan chair, MAS vice president and president. Merle has some astronomy books for the children when they come out again in May. The treasurer's report puts us about where we should be at this time of year. Additional Gemini expenses have been covered from other budget items. Money-market returns continue to be low. Membership numbers remain stable, but patron memberships are converting to regular ones. ■

vast majority of attendees drive. They come in cars, vans, trailers and RVs and park or camp on-site. WSP is located on tiny West Summerland Key at about mile marker 34 in the Florida Keys. It is 10 miles east of Summerland Key, which is at mile marker 24. (Mile marker 0 is near the post office in Key West.) To go farther than mile marker 0 on Highway 1, you will need a boat.

The Site

WSP takes place at The Girl Scouts' Camp Wesumkee. Its 11-acre oceanfront location is a good getaway from Minnesota winter, but it is not exactly luxurious or scenic. A few years ago, most of the palm trees were killed by hurricanes Rita and Wilma. One of the main structures of the camp lies fenced off and crumbling from a hurricane several years before that. A thick grove of trees lines Highway 1, which lies just a hundred feet or so north of the observing field. To the east are a few small keys, the seven-mile bridge, and light-polluted Marathon Key about 10 miles away. The glow from Key West is also visible. But to the south there is

Continued on page 6

Astronomy Days

Astronomy Days were held at Onan Observatory on Friday evening, May 1, and on Saturday, May 2, from noon until 10:00 p.m. The skies were fairly clear on Friday night, and visitors were able to view the Moon, Saturn, and other sky objects. Saturday night was entirely clouded over, with only the waxing gibbous Moon visible when the clouds cleared a little. However, the enthusiastic crowd enjoyed presentations by the following MAS members:

- 1:00 p.m. Merle Hiltner: "International Year of Astronomy and Galileo"
- 2:00 p.m. Michael Kauper: "How To Do Astronomy with Children"
- 3:00 p.m. Bill Arden: "The Stories of the Stars"
- 6:00 p.m. Bob Kerr: "Exploring Tonight's Sky"
- 7:00 p.m. Ron Schmidt: "The Grand Tour"

Photographs by Ben Huset and Father Brown



Continued from on page 4

nothing but ocean, a guy named Fidel, and steady southern skies!

Accommodations

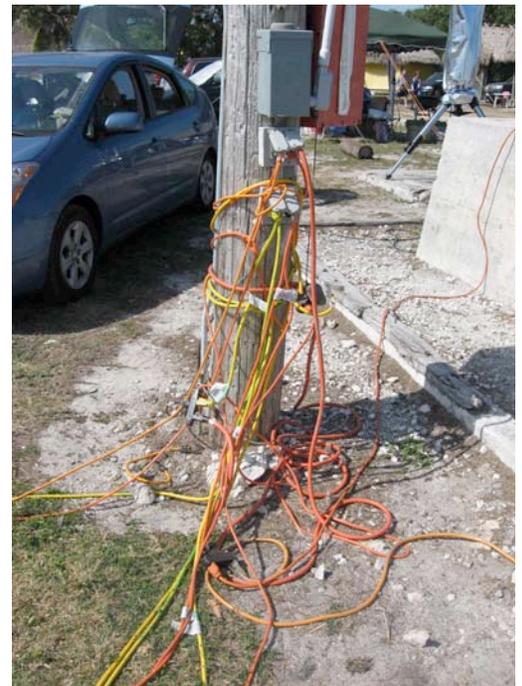
My recommendation is to stay on-site at WSP if you can. You will need transportation, plenty of sunscreen, a few hundred feet of extension cord, an umbrella, sunshades for your tent and for yourself. Bring a big cooler full of snacks, water, and enough food to last a few days. There is a lunch wagon on-site, but some years they run short on food.

Conclusion

Whether you bring a scope or not, the Winter Star Party is a lot of fun. But most importantly it is warm in February and the seeing in the Keys is first class. If you are into imaging, double stars, or viewing the planets, or you just want to see Omega Centauri, you really should experience the Winter Star Party at least once. 🌌



There is a wide variety of scopes at WSP.



Got a permit for that?

Directions to the Star Party Locations

For maps and further details about the sites, please go to our website at www.mnastro.org/facilities.

Baylor Regional Park

To reach Baylor Regional Park, head west on Minnesota Highway 5, through Chanhassen and Waconia, to the town of Norwood-Young America. Turn right onto Carver County Road 33 and continue approximately two miles north. Baylor Regional Park is on the right side of the road, marked with a prominent sign. When entering the park, stay to the right and follow the road approx 1/4 mile. When visiting the Baylor Regional Park, MAS members are requested not to park or drive on the grass. There is a drive up to the observatory which can be used for loading or unloading or handicapped parking only. For an alternate route from the southern suburbs, take U.S. Highway 212 west to Norwood-Young America. Turn right at the second traffic light onto Carver County Road 33. Continue two miles north to the park entrance.

Cherry Grove

Cherry Grove is located south of the Twin Cities, in Goodhue County, about 20 miles south of Cannon Falls. To reach Cherry Grove, head south on Highway 52. On 52 about six miles south of Cannon Falls, and just past the Edgewood Inn, is a large green highway sign for Goodhue County Rd. 1 west. Turn right, and follow County 1 straight south for about sixteen miles until you arrive at a "T" intersection with County A. The observatory is immediately at your right, nestled in the shoulder of the "T." Parking is permitted on the site, or along the road, preferably County A.

Metcalf

To reach Metcalf, head east from St. Paul along Hwy. 94. About four miles east of the I-694 / I-494 crossing is Minnesota State Highway 95, also known as Manning Avenue (exit 253). Turn south (right turn) and then almost immediately turn left onto the frontage road (Hudson Road S). Continue east on the frontage road for about one and one-half miles. Turn right onto Indian Trail, checking the odometer as you turn. Follow Indian Trail south for just about one and one-tenth miles, where you'll see an unmarked chain-link gate on the right, opening onto a dirt driveway with slight up-slope. This is the the entrance to Metcalf.

Long Lake Conservation Center

From Western Twin cities: Take I-94 west to Rogers/MN 101. Go north/right on MN 101 through Elk River, where MN 101 becomes 169. Continue north on US 169 approximately 90 miles to Aitkin. At stoplight in Aitkin, turn east/right onto US 169/MN 210 and go out of town eight miles. Then turn east/right, following MN 210 toward Duluth. Proceed seven miles. A large green highway sign marks the turn off 210 to Long Lake Conservation Center. Turn north/left on County Rd. 5. After three miles, turn east/right on gravel County Rd. 88. It is approximately one mile to the LLCC gate. Follow signs to parking and unloading areas.

From Eastern Twin cities: Go north on I-35 to Finlayson/Exit 195. Turn west/left and go one mile to County Rd. 61 and MN 18. At stop sign turn right/north and go two miles. Follow MN 18 west/left and continue 19 miles to MN 65. Turn north/right on MN 65 and proceed 30 miles to McGregor. Intersect with MN 210 and follow 210 west/left (through McGregor) for seven miles. A large green highway sign marks the turn off MN 210 to Long Lake Conservation Center. Turn north/right on County Rd. 5. After three miles, turn east/right on gravel County Rd. 88. It is approximately one mile to the LLCC gate. Follow signs to parking and unloading areas.

Minnesota Astronomical Society 2009 Star Party Schedule

Date	Star Party Location	Onan Public Night	Special Events	Astronomical Twilight Begins	Moonrise	Moonset	Moon % Illuminated
5/1/09		5/2/09	Astronomy Day 5/1-5/2	10:17 PM	12:09 PM	2:50 AM	43%
5/15/09	Onan,LLCC	5/16/09		10:45 PM	1:23 AM	10:59 AM	69%
5/22/09	Cherry Grove,LLCC		Virgo Venture at CG and LLCC	10:59 PM	3:56 AM	7:04 PM	7%
5/29/09	Metcalf	5/30/09		11:12 PM	11:15 AM	1:18 AM	29%
6/12/09		6/13/09		11:32 PM	12:12 AM	9:53 AM	83%
6/19/09	Cherry Grove,LLCC			11:36 PM	2:23 AM	5:56 PM	17%
6/26/09	Onan,Metcalf,LLCC	6/27/09		11:36 PM	10:14 AM	11:44 PM	17%
7/10/09		7/11/09		11:23 PM	10:38 PM	9:52 AM	93%
7/17/09	Onan,Metcalf,LLCC			11:13 PM	12:54AM	4:49 PM	31%
7/24/09	Cherry Grove,LLCC		Camping under The Stars 7-24-7/26	11:00 PM	9:08 AM	10:08 PM	7%
8/7/09		8/8/09		10:31 PM	9:03 PM	8:49 AM	99%
8/14/09	Onan,LLCC	8/15/09		10:15 PM	12:17 AM	3:45 PM	45%
8/21/09	Cherry Grove,LLCC		Special LLCC Star Party*	9:59 PM	7:59 AM	8:32 PM	1%
8/28/09	Metcalf	8/29/09		9:44 PM	4:05 PM	12:23 AM	58%
9/11/09	Onan,LLCC	9/12/09		9:12 PM	11:09 PM	3:41 PM	59%
9/18/09	Cherry Grove		Fall Mini Messier Marathon at CG	8:57 PM	6:49 AM	6:55 PM	1%
9/25/09	Metcalf	9/26/09		8:43 PM	2:45 PM	11:11 PM	41%
10/9/09	Metcalf	10/10/09		8:16 PM	10:08 PM	2:27 PM	73%
10/16/09	Cherry Grove			8:04 PM	5:44 AM	5:19 PM	5%
10/23/09	Onan	10/24/09		7:53 PM	1:21 PM	9:59 PM	25%
11/6/09	Metcalf	11/7/09		6:34 PM	8:10 PM	12:08 PM	85%
11/13/09	Cherry Grove,LLCC			6:28 PM	3:43 AM	2:46 PM	14%
11/20/09	Onan,LLCC			6:23 PM	10:55 AM	7:49 PM	11%
12/4/09	Metcalf			6:18 PM	7:11 PM	10:43 AM	95%
12/11/09	Onan			6:18 PM	2:46 AM	1:14 PM	27%

This schedule is subject to change. You can also check the MAS online calendar at www.mnastro.org for a complete schedule of all MAS events. Onan/Baylor, Cherry Grove and Metcalf Star Parties are held on Friday nights, with Saturday reserved as the backup night if Friday is cloudy. LLCC Star parties are held on both Friday and Saturday night. These are MAS members-only parties and LLCC Parking Permit is required. Onan Public nights are held on Saturday nights only. In 2009 daylight Savings time begins March 8 and ends on Nov 1.

MAS Loses a Founding Father



Connery, John H., age 85, of Edina, formerly of Golden Valley. Preceded in death by wife, Marcella; parents, Myrna and Russell Connery; brothers, Thomas and Timothy Connery. Survived by brothers, Michael (Carol) and Patrick Connery; sisters-in-law, Leola and Patricia Connery; many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews. John worked for the City of St. Louis Park Public Works

Dept. for 25 years and retired from Metropolitan Sewer Commission. He served as a civilian aircraft mechanic at Hickom Field in Hawaii during World War II and was a long-time volunteer with the Big Brothers organization. John was also an avid astronomer, photographer and world traveler. Mass of Christian Burial on Tuesday 11 a.m. at the Church of St. Patrick, Valley View Road at Gleason Road, Edina. Interment in Gethsemane Cemetery. Visitation Monday 5-8 p.m. at Gearty-Delmore Park Funeral Chapel, Wooddale Ave. S. at Excelsior Blvd. and one hour prior to the Mass at the church.

Uncle John, a man of integrity, compassion, understanding and values. He looked at life as an adventure: new places, new faces, searching the galaxy for wonders and marveling at the ones on earth. A husband to one, a father figure to many and a friend to all. This short adventure may be over but the true eternal adventure is just beginning. I have been blessed to have loved him... Brian Connery, Lindstrom, Minnesota.

It's with sadness that I report that John Connery passed away. John was a long-time member of MAS and was a member of the original team that built Cherry Grove when the property was first purchased by MAS. In recent years John was a regular at our monthly meetings and

often attended star parties at Cherry Grove. We will miss him... Steve Emert, MAS vice president

This is sad, indeed. John was a remarkable man whom we all admired. He contributed from his heart to the astro community. Always active, always an inspiration, he will be greatly missed by all... Tom Lindquist

This hit me like the proverbial ton of bricks. John was one of the nicest, friendliest folks you could ever hope to know. Some of my most enjoyable memories of MAS activities involve John. He was a regular at my first star parties and always made me feel welcome. Then there was the 1991 trip to Baja for the total eclipse, to which John took his self-made travel telescope he liked to call "frag-uh-lee" (after the word he'd stenciled on the exterior of its travel case). He was always ready and eager to help at Astronomy Days and other MAS outreach events. In addition to his contributions at CGO, John was there in the early days at Onan, helping with planning and construction. I'll always remember him for his sense of humor (John: "Mike, could you hand me that hammerfor?" Mike: "What's a hammerfor?" You get the idea.)

For those who never got to know John before he left us, my condolences; you definitely missed getting to know a wonderful person. And to those of us who knew John, here's to one of the original founding fathers of the Minnesota Astronomical Society. But, more importantly, here's to our friend and comrade who contributed so much to our group, and who made being a member of the MAS so enjoyable. Thanks, John... Mike Kibat

I am sure we will all miss John. He attended most of the monthly meetings and visited Cherry Grove frequently with his friend Vic Heiner. John always had a story or two about the earlier days of the club... Bill Kocken



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To Renew Your *Sky and Telescope* Subscription

If you like, you may mail your renewal notice with payment directly to S&T or renew via phone with Sky Publishing at 1-800-253-0245. This new process will especially be of benefit to those of you who wait until your subscription is about to expire before renewing.

You will still need to send in your MAS membership renewal to the MAS Membership Coordinator at the MAS Post Office box address, or renew your membership via PayPal.

If you wish, you can still submit your S&T subscription renewal to the MAS when you renew your membership in the MAS, and we will enter your renewal on your behalf just as we always have done.

New subscriptions to Sky and Telescope at the MAS member discount must still be sent to the MAS for group membership subscription processing. Send new subscriptions to the attention of the Membership Coordinator at the MAS at the Post Office box address shown on the back cover of the *Gemini* newsletter

To subscribe to the MAS e-mail list visit:
<http://lists.mnastro.org/mnastro/listinfo/>
and follow the subscription instructions.

There is a general list (MAS) as well as special interest group (SIG) lists. Archives of the lists are also available by visiting the listinfo page for a specific list.

The MAS list has about 40% of the membership on it.