

The Skyscraper

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The Amateur Astronomical Society of Rhode Island

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See back page for directions to Seagrave Observatory.

Please submit items for the newsletter by August 15 to Jim Hendrickson, 1 Sunflower Circle, North Providence, RI 02911 or e mail to jim@distantgalaxy.com

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The Skyscraper

August 2004

August Meeting

Friday August 6, 7:30pm at Seagrave Observatory

For our August meeting, we are looking forward to a return visit from **Dennis DiCicco**, senior editor at Sky and Telescope magazine. Unfortunately, the turnout for Dennis' last visit to us was a bit on the light side due to the heavy snowstorm occurring during our December meeting. We feel fortunate to have him returning and hopefully he will be able to share some of the results from his trip to Italy to view the transit of Venus and maybe a reprise of some of his recent eclipse results.

Skyscrapers Calendar

Public observing is held every Saturday at Seagrave Observatory weather permitting and when the grounds are accessible.

August 6 **7:30pm Monthly Meeting** at Seagrave Observatory
Friday

August 7 **dusk Public Observing Night** at Seagrave
Saturday **Observatory**

August 14 **dusk Public Observing Night** at Seagrave
Saturday **Observatory**

August 21 **dusk Public Observing Night** at Seagrave
Saturday **Observatory**

August 28 **dusk Public Observing Night** at Seagrave
Saturday **Observatory**



President's Message

Dan Lorraine, President

July was another busy month for Skyscrapers, starting with our annual cookout on July 10th that was very successful and well attended. I would like to thank Dolores and Ken Rinaldi, and Jack and Ileen Szelka for all of their help with the cookout this year. And then there was the trip to the University of California's research center located at an elevation of 10,150 feet above sea level on the top of White Mountain. Twenty one intrepid Skyscrapers made the journey and met up with five of Al Hall's friends at the research center, and we were all treated to some magnificent views through the telescopes they brought – a 5" Astro-Physics refractor, an 8" Celestron Cassegrain, and a 22" F5.6 Dobsonian. The filamentary detail in the Veil nebula was beyond belief in the 22" and it was also very easy to see the Veil in a pair of 10x50mm binoculars. Most observers were able to see the central star in the Ring Nebula winking in and out through the 22" Dob. Objects like the globular cluster M13 in Hercules, the spiral galaxy M33 in Triangulum, and the Lagoon Nebula M8 in Sagittarius were all naked eye objects under these very dark skies! The Milky Way stretched from horizon to horizon and offered up more detail than I've ever seen before! The weather cooperated on all three nights that we spent on the mountain.

During the day there was time for some sightseeing, which included trips to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, which features the oldest living things on the Earth. Many of these trees are 4,000 years old and there is one, known as Methuselah that is over 5,000 years old! Mono Lake was

another interesting destination spot, famous for its Tufa formations. Tufa forms under Mono Lake's waters. When fresh water springs bubble up through the carbonate-rich lake water, the calcium and carbonates react to form a calcium carbonate salt deposit, which is called a Tufa. This solid, limestone-like material continues to develop, eventually forming vertical towers with spring water percolating up through and around them. Since the lake has been receding for years now, many of these features are visible along the lakeshore creating a very beautiful but alien landscape.

We spent our first and last night of the trip at Furnace Creek in Death Valley. The first day it was 118 degrees and the last day it was 123 degrees! Death Valley was a geologist's paradise! We all visited Badwater Basin in Death Valley, which at 282 feet below sea level is the fifth lowest elevation in the world (first in the continental US). Photos of Badwater and other points of interest from Death Valley like the Artists Pallet, Devils Golf Course, Titus Canyon, Ubehebe Crater, and more, can be seen on the Skyscrapers website at www.theskyscrapers.org.

Thanks to Bob Horton for organizing such a wonderful trip! Unfortunately, Bob's father passed away on Saturday July 17th and Bob was not able to go with us. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Bob and his family.

Stardust Shower in August

David A Huestis, Historian

Many folks seem to remember there's a major meteor shower sometime in August. Why? Because people spend more time outdoors during mid-summer. Whether it's camping or catching a movie at the surviving drive-in theaters, they're bound to see more meteors than usual blaze across the sky. That meteor shower of which so many people are familiar is the August Perseids, usually peaking between the 11th and the 13th.

How long has it been since this display of shooting stars put on a decent show? During the last 20 years we've either been mooned-out (like last year), or the weather has not cooperated. This year the Perseids will occur with a waning crescent moon in the sky (just 3 days from new). Almost perfect! All we have to do now is cross our fingers, legs and eyes that Mother Nature provides us with clear skies.

The peak night that we hope will be clear is August 11-12. The waning crescent Moon, rising around 2:00 am, will not hinder observing. Furthermore, there is a potentially added bonus occurring this year. Astronomers predict that on the 11th the Earth will glide through a dense stream of relatively "fresh" particles left behind by Comet Swift-Tuttle back in 1862. We may experience a brief enhancement of activity. Unfortunately this increase of activity may happen before sunset for us on the night of the 11th. Just in case the prediction is off by a few hours, I'd recommend you begin scanning the skies right after sunset. We might just get lucky. Over 100 meteors per hour could be seen for a short time.

The normal peak of activity (which will still perform as usual) occurs from midnight to dawn, with up to 60 meteors per hour visible. The meteors appear to radiate

from an area of sky, called the radiant point, in the constellation Perseus. As Perseus rises off the northeast horizon, the number of meteors seen will increase as the night progresses.

As always, to maximize your viewing opportunities, choose a dark site from which to observe. Get comfortable in a lounge chair, face northeast, protect yourself with mosquito repellent, and enjoy the show. Also, try to observe with a friend or two. There's nothing worse than missing a worthwhile display of meteors because you dozed off!

If the display is quite active you won't have any trouble maintaining your vigilance. You'll know you've seen a

Brian Magaw A Remembrance

10th Anniversary Remembrance



BRIAN MAGAW
1958-1994

Pen and ink portrait of Brian by award winning science fiction and fantasy artist Allen Koszowski.

Ten years ago this July, Skyscrapers were both ecstatic and sad at the same time. While we and the world were anxiously awaiting the icy fragments of Shoemaker-Levy 9 to plunge into Jupiter's atmosphere, our colleague Brian D. Magaw lost his courageous battle with cancer.

It was Monday night, July 11, that Brian's wife Darlene called to tell me that Brian didn't have much time left.

Perseid because they are usually green, red or orange. Fireballs, brilliant and exploding meteors, have been more frequently reported from observers with better observing conditions than us in recent years as well. The Perseids are really fast shooting stars too, coming in at around 134,222 miles per hour. Stay alert and be ready to duck!

Good luck with this year's August Perseids. Don't forget to watch for any sign of enhanced activity during the early evening of the 11th. Keep your eyes (don't forget to un-cross them) to the skies.

Perhaps he had only a few hours remaining. I called Dan Lorraine and we finally decided to travel to Boston the next morning. It was not something I was looking forward to, but I knew I would have regretted not doing so.

Brian's mom and dad were there with Darlene. Dan and I hadn't been there more than 20 minutes when Brian slipped away, Tuesday, July 12. I lost a longtime friend that day. The family lost a devoted son, a great husband, a dad and a brother. Skyscrapers lost a dedicated member who had not only raised the bar during his terms as president, but also made many more contributions to our society throughout the years.

Life goes on, as the saying goes, and sure enough, beginning on Saturday, July 16, the first fragment of SL-9 crashed into Jupiter. The rest is history. On Monday, the 18th, the largest fragment hit, and as Jupiter rotated into view we were greeted by an "bull's eye" impact feature in Jupiter's cloud tops. Before the recent Venus transit, the SL-9 impact was one of the most exciting events for me to witness since my first total solar eclipse.

The roller coaster ride of mixed emotions was very difficult to reconcile, but I finally did manage to do so. I am not a religious person, but I do believe something of the person still survives the corporeal death. Call it spirit if you will. I found comfort in my belief that Brian's spirit was no longer tethered to this earth and that he had a ring side seat to the unfolding Jovian spectacle. Brian was now at one with the universe he and I used to explore through the telescopes at Seagrave Observatory.

Dave Huestis, Historian

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It was a cool autumn night as I headed out to the observatory eager to try out my new 24mm Panoptic eyepiece. As I pulled into the parking lot, the peepots were still singing away, however, it wasn't the strong

chorus that we're all treated to during the summer months at Seagrave. It seemed as if they were starting to wind down, getting ready for their long winter slumber. And after all, they deserved it - they had been busy since the early spring and needed the rest. It was a very clear and cool night and the sky seemed especially dark tonight considering all of the development that's gone on around here since I joined over 30 years ago. I walked behind the Clark building and over to the 12" Meade and proceeded to open up the building. As I slid the roof back I got the feeling I often get when I'm at Seagrave, a feeling that I knew I wasn't alone. There is a kindred soul that is always here, always with us and with a watchful, warm, and caring eye for these grounds that he once loved so much.

It was 1973 when I first joined Skyscrapers. After seeing an article in the weekend section of the Providence Journal about the observatory, I sent a letter off asking if I could become part of the "observatory" . even if I could only sweep the floors and help to keep the place clean . anything to just be around the 8.25" Clark refractor. Since I had just turned 14 years old the reply from the "observatory" informed me that all I had to do to become member was to pay my dues! Wow, easier than I had thought! It was on my first trip to the observatory that I met Brian Magaw and our love of astronomy immediately bound us as brothers for life! We quickly became very active in the organization spending many weekend nights observing and then sleeping on the clubhouse floor in our sleeping bags for most of the morning. Our mothers dropped us off Friday night and picked us up late Sunday morning. At that time there were quite a few junior and younger members that had the enthusiasm and stamina to pull off these all night observing sessions. During the day we worked to maintain the grounds: mowing, pruning, painting, and what ever else needed to be done.

Throughout the years Brian held many elected positions with Skyscrapers, including President, and made many significant contributions. He was a can do guy with a positive attitude that was extremely contagious. He was never one to waste time talking about why something couldn't be done, rather his constructive discussions and leadership always moved the organization in a direction that said we can overcome the obstacles in our path and yes we can and will achieve the goal. He brought out the spirit of volunteerism in all of us and members were happy to help. The most impressive thing about Brian is that he had fun with everything he did. He loved to joke . he loved to laugh . and people loved to be with him.

In July 1994 Brian died at the young age of 35 after a courageous battle with cancer. A life tragically cut short, but a life completely fulfilled. You see Brian lived life large every day. He was clearly a man put on this earth with a mission and he achieved it. He figured out

how to put two lifetimes of achievements into a short 35 years, and then moved onto something else.

It was several days after we buried Brian that I remember stepping outside and looking up at the night sky. That evening the first piece of Comet Shoemaker-Levy smashed into Jupiter, and I remember thinking to myself "that son of a gun, he did this just in time to have a ringside seat for the show!"

Brian was my friend.

Dan Lorraine, President

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I initially met Brian Magaw back in March 1986 at Beaver Tail State Park during the Apparition of Halley's Comet. Brian assisted me in setting up my camera and tripod and instructed me as to how to properly photograph the comet. Since that initial introduction we became very good friends.

Brian and I often attended the annual STARCONN convention in Connecticut. Brian always drove! During the long drive we would have interesting conversations about the splendors of the Universe.

Brian was also a gifted speaker. I remember attending many a presentation usually on astrophotography. Brian would have embraced the current digital CCD revolution. What incredible images he would have taken.

Brian was also the team leader for the July 7th, 1991 total solar eclipse in Hawaii. I remember setting up on a lava field the night before aligning our telescopes when Brian flagged down an automobile with a PIZZA HUT sign. We all ordered pizza and had it delivered to the middle of nowhere all thanks to Brian. We ate our meal on an ancient lava flow- it felt as if we were on the moon!

Brian Magaw was taken away at such a young age. For all of us that knew him, Brian's spirit and passion for the stars lives on in all of us.

*Gregory T. Shanos
Longboat Key (Sarasota) Florida
Skyscraper Member (1986-1990)*

Secretary's Report

Joel Cohen, Secretary

Monthly Meeting

July 10, 2004

Meeting Start - 7:34 P.M. Dan Lorraine opened the monthly meeting with a moment of silence in memory of former Skyscrapers President, Brian Magaw whose passing was 10 years ago. Steve Hubbard presented our featured speaker for the evening, Dr. Alan Hirshfeld. Dr. Hirshfeld spoke about the history of astronomical discoveries related to the development of observing equipment in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Secretary's Report - Correction to the published report identified Providence Mutual as our past insurance carrier. Notes were accepted as published with the above correction.

Treasurer's Report - Delivered at the meeting by Bill Kirby and accepted.

Trustee's Report - Ted Ferneza reported that an infestation of carpenter ants had been dealt with successfully in the roof section of the 16" roll off. Dan Lorraine mentioned that a section of wall in the Clark building needed to be attended to .

Librarian/Historian - Dave Huestis reported that a new listing of available books has been prepared.

New Business - New member names submitted for application were Michael DiToro, Gene Kusmierz and Ron Messier. Joel Cohen asked that sets of Blinkies be purchased and installed at the doorways to the Patton and 12" Meade to prevent accidental knocks on one's noggin.

Old Business - Sean Woodard was voted in as a member.

Good of the Organization - Bill Kirby mentioned that one additional subscription to Astronomy Magazine is still required to reach the promotional minimum of five new subscriptions. Dave Huestis mentioned the website Heavens Above as a resource for appearances of ephemeris such as the ISS and Iridium Flares. Kathy Siok noted that the New England Assoc. of Chemistry Teachers is holding a meeting at Brown and will have an observing night at Seagrave.

Bob Napier noted the passing of Fred Ewalt this past April. He further noted that the items he listed for sale in the past Skyscraper are those of Fred's and that he is assisting the Ewalt family in liquidating those assets.

Bob Horton reminded us all that the call for volunteers at AstroAssembly is out. He said that the list of speakers is filling out.

Dan Lorraine announced the planning of a Skyscrapers outing to Lowell Observatory in Arizona next year, dates still to be determined.

Adjournment - 9:40 P.M.

For Sale

Bob Napier noted the passing of Fred Ewalt this past April. Many will remember Fred as a dedicated supernova observer. Bob further noted that the items he listed for sale in the past Skyscraper are those of Fred's and that he is assisting the Ewalt family in liquidating those assets.

If interested of for more information, contact Bob at bob_napier@hotmail.com.

MEADE 10" f-6.3 Classic w/carrying case, Meade SuperWedge, Tripod, JMI WheelyBars, 2D Balance (top and bottom), 20mm Meade Eyepiece

MEADE 8" f-6.3 UHTC, Autostar II, GPS, SMT, Meade SuperWedge, Tripod, JMI WheelyBars, 2D Balance (top and bottom), 26mm Meade Eyepiece

SBIG ST9E CCD Camera w/CF8A Color Filter Wheel, RGB + IR Block Filters, Hard Case, Power Supplies, cables, w/water cooling option, CCDOPS Software

SBIG ST7E CCD Camera w/CF8 Color Filter Wheel, RGB + IR Block Filters, Hard Case, Power Supplies, cables, w/water cooling option, CCDOPS Software

EYEPIECES - MEADE Super Plossls, 9.7mm, 12.4mm, 15mm, 20mm Wide Angle, Meade 9mm Illuminate Reticule Eyepiece

Accessories

MEADE f-6.3 Focal Reducer

MEADE 1-1/4" Diagonal

CELESTRON Filter Set - 6 filters for 1-1/4" eyepieces

CELESTRON 2X Barlow - 1-1/4"

HOMEYER 1-1/4" Flip Mirror System w/Meade 25mm CCD Framing eyepiece

HOMEYER 1-1/4" Flip Mirror System w/Meade 25mm CCD Framing eyepiece

SOFTWARE - MEADE EPOCH 2000, CCDSOFT V.5 w/manuals

Directions to Seagrave Observatory

From the Providence area:

Take Rt. 6 West to Interstate 295 in Johnston and proceed west on Rt. 6 to Scituate. In Scituate bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right onto Rt. 116 North. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Coventry/West Warwick area:

Take Rt. 116 North. Peeptoad Road is the first left after crossing Rt. 101.

From Southern Rhode Island:

Take Interstate 95 North. Exit onto Interstate 295 North in Warwick (left exit.) Exit to Rt. 6 West in Johnston. Bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right on Rt. 116. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Northern Rhode Island:

Take Rt. 116 South. Follow Rt. 116 thru Greenville. Turn left at Knight's Farm intersection (Rt. 116 turns left) and follow Rt. 116. Watch for Peeptoad Road on the right.

From Connecticut:

- Take Rt. 44 East to Greenville and turn right on Rt. 116 South. Turn left at Knight's Farm intersection (Rt. 116 turn left) and follow Rt. 116. Watch for Peeptoad Road on the right.
- Take Rt. 6 East toward Rhode Island; bear left on Rt. 101 East and continue to intersection with Rt. 116. Turn left; Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Massachusetts:

Take Interstate 295 South (off Interstate 95 in Attleboro.) Exit onto Rt. 6 West in Johnston. Bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right on Rt. 116. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.



**47 PEEPTOAD ROAD
NORTH SCITUATE, RI 02857**