

## The Skyscraper

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### The Amateur Astronomical Society of Rhode Island

47 Peepthead Road  
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[www.theskyscrapers.org](http://www.theskyscrapers.org)

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See back page for directions to Seagrave Observatory.

Please submit items for the newsletter by September 15 to Jim Hendrickson, 1 Sunflower Circle, North Providence, RI 02911 or e-mail to [jim@distantgalaxy.com](mailto:jim@distantgalaxy.com)

#### Email subscriptions:

To receive *The Skyscraper* by email, send email with your name and address to [jim@distantgalaxy.com](mailto:jim@distantgalaxy.com). Note that you will no longer receive the newsletter by postal mail.

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# The Skyscraper

September 2004

## September Meeting

### Friday, September 10, 7:30pm at Seagrave Observatory

Our guest for this evening is **Dr. John Huchra** of The Harvard Smithsonian Observatory.

From Dr. Huchra on his lecture "Humankind has wondered about its place in the Universe since the dawn of time. Our world view has progressed from the valley we lived in (Olduvai Gorge?) to the flat Earth of the early Greeks and Romans, through a Universe only as big as the Milky Way to today's infinite(!) Universe that seems slated to expand forever. The first crude attempts to map our Universe started less than 30 years ago. Today, with digital sky surveys and multi object spectrographs that allow the measurement of hundreds of galaxy distances simultaneously, we have begun to make real maps of the Universe nearby. I will describe our latest such project, the construction of a fully 3-D map of the whole sky based on the 2 Micron All Sky Survey and large numbers of redshifts collected from a worldwide network of telescopes. With this survey, we hope to pin down the source of the Galaxy's motion with respect to the Cosmic Microwave background and to elucidate the real relation between the distribution of ordinary matter and dark matter."

I invite you to visit his website: [cfa-www.harvard.edu/~huchra](http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/~huchra).

## Skyscrapers Calendar

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

<b>September 4 Saturday</b>	<b>dusk</b>	<b>Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>September 10 Friday</b>	<b>7:30pm</b>	<b>September Meeting at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>September 11 Saturday</b>	<b>dusk</b>	<b>Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>September 18 Saturday</b>	<b>dusk</b>	<b>Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>September 25 Saturday</b>	<b>dusk</b>	<b>Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>October 1 Friday</b>	<b>7:00pm</b>	<b>AstroAssembly Friday Night Tent Talks at Seagrave Observatory</b>
<b>October 2 Saturday</b>		<b>AstroAssembly at Seagrave Observatory</b>

# Space Places in Rhode Island: Part IV

*David A Huestis, Historian*

When I started this series of columns on Space Places in Rhode Island, I failed to mention a cozy little observatory on the Knight Campus of the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). Though the instruments are used primarily to support the astronomy curriculum at the college, special public viewing nights are scheduled once classes resume in the fall. For those provincial folks among you who don't like to travel great distances, here's a little information about this local facility.

As space places in Rhode Island go, the CCRI observatory is a fairly new facility dedicated to the teaching of science in our state. Under the direction of Margaret M. Jacoby, a faculty member, the observatory was constructed in 1978. From then until her retirement, Margaret Jacoby shared her love of astronomy not only with her students, but also with the countless families who visited her observatory for a glimpse of our beautiful universe.

Her dedication to science and teaching was acknowledged on November 15, 1995 when the observatory was re-christened the "Margaret M. Jacoby Observatory." It was obvious to most why she was so cherished. She wanted to make a difference in the lives of her students. I found a quote during my research that summed up her commitment to teaching. "I think it is important not just to make scientists out of (students), but to open them up to the universe, so that when they read things in the paper or on TV, they can be a little more critical because they have some background."

This little observatory looks like your typical observatory with a cylindrical sheet metal building topped by a 25-foot diameter dome with a mechanical shutter that opens the observatory to the sky. Inside is a 14-inch Celestron telescope, upon which is mounted another 8-inch Celestron telescope of similar design. Though these telescopes are small by today's standards, they do provide splendid images. Several problems do plague the observatory, however.

If you are familiar with the Knight Campus, you realize it sits high atop a hill across from the old Midland Mall, now the Rhode Island Mall. If the observatory were situated somewhere near the top of that hill, a commanding view of the sky from horizon to horizon would greet the visitor. However, the observatory is located down the hill nestled amongst the trees, thereby limiting the view of the sky and the astronomical objects in it.

The second, perhaps more severe problem is the light pollution. The two malls, the Route 2 stretch of retail stores, the airport, and all the surrounding neighborhoods pour a lot of light up into the sky. The brightness of the sky not only limits the number of celestial objects that can be observed, but also reduces the quality of the view. The fact that the observatory is somewhat shielded by trees may actually help a little. A spokesman also commented that they have to be on constant alert for passing aircraft, as the landing lights can temporarily blind a person if they are looking through one of the instruments when a plane goes by!!

Regardless, despite the poor observing conditions, I know firsthand what these instruments are capable of. Light pollution does not severely hamper observing objects like the Moon and the bright planets out to Saturn. A great wealth of detail awaits even an inexperienced observer.

As of this writing the observatory is scheduled to begin some public observing nights in October. Special arrangements can be made for private observing sessions for scouts and other civic groups. You can review the public night schedule for yourself by visiting the observatory at <http://physics.ccri.edu/observ.htm> Directions to CCRI and other information can also be found at this web site. To find the observatory on the campus: proceed up the hill to the campus; take your first right (sign says PRIVATE, but proceed down this narrow road); observatory is ahead.

I hope you will visit the Margaret M. Jacoby Observatory sometime this fall. Enjoy some of the wonders of the universe though the telescopes provided. Just watch out for Flight 101!

In my next installment of "Space Places in Rhode Island," I'm finally going to make you do some driving to one of the last few dark sky observatories in our state. We'll "scope out" Frosty Drew Observatory down at Ninigret Park in Charlestown. Yes, way down in South County! Hey, if you can get to the beaches, you can get to the observatory (although you'll probably have to do it in the dark)!!

Until next time, keep your eyes to the skies. And remember, Seagrave Observatory is open every Saturday night for your viewing pleasure, weather permitting of course. Visit us at <http://www.theskyscrapers.org> for information.

# A Few Words about the Improved Skyscrapers Website

*Jim Hendrickson, Editor*

Since the last iteration of this website went live, Skyscrapers has been busy. So busy in fact, that we quickly outgrew the old website. Increased interest and participation in Skyscrapers events and outings, combined with the prevalence of digital cameras, has steadily increased the amount of photo submissions for website publishing. We also wanted to have a more public-friendly online presence in order to increase awareness of who we are and what we do.

The website has been updated with a refreshing new look, but not too radical of a change as to be confusing to those already familiar with the way it has been. You will find among the many new changes, the main navigation bar below the header has remained unchanged. This allows you to access nearly all of the information in the site the same way you have in the past.

If you haven't been there recently, please check it out at [www.theskyscrapers.org](http://www.theskyscrapers.org). Some of the new things you will find.

## **Skyscrapers Home Page**

Probably the first thing you noticed, the home page has undergone a substantial transformation. The same information is available now as before, but it should be much easier to find. The main features are the same as before--monthly meeting notices, newest articles or image slideshows, and important or timely notices. The difference here, is that new categories were added to organize featured items.

## **What's New**

Here you will find a chronological list of recent notable additions to the website. Now it will be easier to keep up to date when new photos are added to slideshows that have been online for several days or weeks, monthly newsletter issues, or other "hot off the presses" notices.

## **News & Notices**

These are items that are newsworthy, but generally link to information that is displayed more long-term than the top features. Often an item from the top features will find its way into the "News & Notices" section.

## **Astronomy in the News**

There's a lot of exciting stuff going on in astronomy and space these days, and this is the place where you will find some of the more prominent goings-on.

Also new to the home page is the right side bar:

## **What's Happening at Seagrave Observatory**

Previously, we didn't have a list of our activities at Seagrave Observatory in a single place. Now it will be much easier for both the general public and our members to learn about who we are what we do.

## **Library & Literature**

This is essentially our collection of stuff online. Get the newsletter, The Skyscraper, Read articles about on a variety of subjects, and peruse our gallery or archives.

## **Gallery**

Some of you may have noticed that the Skyscrapers Gallery recently underwent some improvements. The gallery has been organized into "slideshow" format, much in the same way you'd expect to photo collection to be organized. The major benefit of this change was to eliminate the need to click the back button in order to go to the next "slide." They can be viewed forwards and backwards, and are numbered for easy reference. There is also now a simple search so that you can find images you're interested in, or if you attended a recent Skyscrapers outing, you just might find yourself by typing your name into the search.

## **Library**

The Skyscrapers Library has been reorganized and improved. Recent featured articles have introduction text and archived articles are grouped by year. There's also a Library Resources Database provided by our Librarian, Dave Huestis, so that members can see what books or videos are available for them to borrow.

In the future, look for much more, including items from the Skyscrapers Archives, a list of past presidents, and some of our distinguished guests.

## **Throughout the site**

You may have also noticed that the typeface is different. The type is bigger and there is more spacing between the lines. We have a lot of information online now and we wanted to make it more comfortable for you to read it.

Did you notice the background image behind the header? Come back tomorrow and see a different one. If you're not sure what it is, look at the bottom of the page below the copyright line.

There are also a lot of changes that have been made "behind the scenes," things you may not see, but were done to improve performance and make maintenance simpler.

### ***The Skyscraper***

The 31-year old newsletter is also going through a transformation. In September 2004, most of our members will receive it electronically rather than through postal mail. This not only saves Skyscrapers a significant sum in printing and postage costs, but it also allows most of our members (those with active email addresses) to be able to read the newsletter several days before they would have received it by postal mail.

For those of you who have been receiving the newsletter electronically in the past will notice a difference in the presentation of the email newsletter. Rich formatting and more feature links to the website will make it more dynamic than the previous version. Of course we will still have the Adobe PDF version, and the Skyscrapers Library will keep paper copies.

### **More to come**

In the near future, more information about our Public Outreach and Star Parties programs will be added.

Members will be able to update their information and check their membership status online. There will also be some improvements and additions to the Members Area.

More content will be added to the Resources pages, and this section will undergo a moderate reorganization.

Over the coming months and years, more photos and documents from the Skyscraper Archives will be added.

An intranet for use by the Executive and Membership Committees will facilitate information sharing within the organization and streamline some of our more tedious tasks.

# AstroAssembly 2004

**Friday & Saturday, October 1st & 2nd at Seagrave Observatory**

Join Skyscrapers, Inc. for AstroAssembly 2004, an annual tradition since 1952.

## **Friday Evening Program: 7:00pm -10:30pm**

### **Friday Night Tent Talks (20 minute limit)**

Short talks by participants, topics on astrophotography, variable star observing, backyard observatories, telescope making, and more. Contact us if you wish to give a short presentation.

### **All Day Saturday**

Registration begins at 9:00am.

Vintage telescope display: bring your old Cave, Criterion, Edmund, Unitron, any instrument 25 years old or older. Prize awarded for the best original or restored vintage scope. \* Telescope optics workshop: have your telescope mirror tested by optics expert Dick Parker. \* Telescope making and astrophotography contests. \* Swap table, H-alpha solar viewing. \* Lunch at the trustees' grill.

## **Saturday Afternoon Program**

### **Ringworld Rendezvous: The Cassini/Huygens Mission**

Robert Naeye

### **Present and Future of the Russian Space Program and Future US-Russian Cooperation in Space**

Anatoly Zak

### **The Best and Worst**

Ed Ting presents a serious (and not so serious) look at the best and worst equipment available for the amateur astronomer.

### **Slooh's Robotic Observatory**

Matt BenDaniel

## **Saturday Evening Program**

To be held at St. Philip's Church, Greenville, RI

Reception, Buffet Dinner, Words of Welcome, AstroQuiz, Raffle Prizes, Keynote Speaker

Details forthcoming

## **Registration**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Members @ \$10 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I would like to give a short talk on Friday

\_\_\_ Non-Members @ \$15 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Buffet Dinner @ \$17 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Mail to:</b> AstroAssembly 47 Peepoad Road North Scituate, RI 02857</p>
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### **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**