

The Skyscraper

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the monthly publication of



**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 September 15 to Jim Hendrickson, 1 Sunflower Circle, North Providence, RI 02911 or e-mail to jim@distantgalaxy.com

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September 2002

“What Works and What Doesn't Work in Science Television”

Friday, September 6, 7:30pm at Seagrave Observatory

How do you get people to watch a complex science topic like string theory or the hunt for supernovae on television? For nearly thirty years, the PBS series NOVA has been at the forefront of trying to blend entertainment with accurate reporting of the hottest scientific discoveries. In a light-hearted presentation that makes some serious points along the way, NOVA's Senior Science Editor, Evan Hadingham, will show a series of clips from recent TV documentaries that highlight attempts to make science work on TV. Many of these clips focus on astronomy and cosmology, and they range from brilliant to hilariously bad.

Refreshments will be served.

Skyscrapers Calendar

Public observing is held on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month at Seagrave Observatory, weather permitting.

September 6 7:30pm September meeting at Seagrave Observatory Friday

September 14 dusk Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory Saturday

September 21 5:00pm Executive Committee Meeting at Seagrave Observatory. Members welcome. Saturday

September 28 dusk Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory Saturday

October 4, 5 AstroAssembly Friday & Saturday

President's Message

Steve Hubbard

By now, I'm sure that many of you are waiting with breathless anticipation for our annual event, AstroAssembly. Many of the speakers have been lined up and we are back at St. Phillips hall for the evening program! This will allow for better facilities and the inclusion of actual wine with the cheese and wine reception for those so inclined. Our featured speaker this year will be Peter Schulz. He's a long time friend of Skyscrapers and a wonderful public speaker. Bob Howe has been hard at work lining up an all-star event for us, so I encourage all of you to come and show your support. While AstroAssembly does provide significant yearly income to us, it is much more than that. It is a place and time where friends come together, relax, recharge and even learn something. It's a great tradition with a long history, but like everything else in life, works only as good as what's put into it for support. Please mark the first Friday and Saturday in October in your calendars now, see you there.

Secretary's Report

Pat Landers, Secretary

Monthly Meeting

August 2, 2002

Meeting called to order at 9:37 p.m.

Treasurer's Report:

There is a total of \$13,929 in the bank. \$3448.03 is in the checking account, and the remainder is savings. The total expenses for the July cookout were \$754.61; this was offset by \$525 in donations and ticket receipts.

Trustees' Report:

Ted Ferneza described the slit problems in the Clark building roof. It is safe to use. The supports on the building housing the Meade 12-inch have been replaced/improved. There will hopefully be another work session in September, possibly to stain some of the buildings.

Membership Committee:

No activity to report.

AstroAssembly:

Kathy Siok announced that Dr. Peter Schultz will present "Deep Impact of a Comet in July 2003" as the evening speaker at AstroAssembly. The afternoon speakers include Pete Kandefér, presenting "The Secret Life of Edmund Halley", and "Wild Bill" Luzader, presenting his annual AstroQuiz. The evening meals will be a choice between baked scrod or steak. Among the raffle items is a Meade ETX 90 being donated by Tom Rinaldi.

Secretary's Report:

Accepted as printed in the newsletter.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

None

Good of the Organization:

Dave Huestis discussed the upcoming Perseid meteor shower, as well as some new books in the library. Al Hall is planning a talk on his recent visit to White Mountain in California. Engineer John Kulick gave a short talk on his theories regarding the expansion of space.

Meeting adjourned at 10:12 p.m.

Editor's Note:

The Skyscraper online

In the process of updating and improving the Skyscrapers web site (<http://www.theskyscrapers.org>), we now have the ability to publish and post *The Skyscraper* on the web as a downloadable and printable PDF file. With the cost of postage on the rise, added to the regular printing expense, it has been determined that Skyscrapers could achieve a significant cost reduction if members who had access to the web and email opted to receive the newsletter electronically rather than traditional mail. Another advantage is that the newsletter is posted to the web at least a week sooner than printing and post mail can deliver it.

If you would like to forgo the paper version and instead get your monthly newsletter from the web, please send your name, address, and email address to jim@distantgalaxy.com. Your postal mail subscription to the newsletter will discontinue, and you will instead be notified by email when the new newsletter is published on the web.

Space Places in Rhode Island

David A Huestis, Librarian

September is a somewhat quiet month astronomically speaking this year. There are no major meteor showers, and most of the brighter planets are not well placed for observing. Though there are still many wondrous celestial objects to view in the vast vault of the heavens, I thought we'd turn our gaze earthward this month and visit one of many "space places" in Rhode Island.

Despite being the smallest state in the U.S., Rhode Island sure does have some fine institutions where amateur astronomers rule and space enthusiasts drool. Most of you are familiar with Seagrave Observatory on Peepoad Road in North Scituate, home of Skyscrapers, Inc., but did you know there are two other major observatories open to the public in Little Rhody: Ladd Observatory on the east side of Providence and Frosty Drew Observatory in Ninigret Park in Charlestown.

In addition, how many of you are aware that the Roger Williams Park Museum in Providence houses the Cormack Planetarium? And don't forget the Planetary Data Center at Brown University where researchers can access just about every image ever acquired by NASA spacecraft. I realize Rhode Islanders don't like to travel far to get anywhere, but all these space places are within a one-hour drive of each and every Rhode Island resident. And with the exception of the Cormack Planetarium which charges a very modest fee, you can't find a less expensive way for a family to spend an afternoon or evening. And in the process, you might even learn something about the universe we live in.

During the next year I'll try to spotlight each of the space places I mentioned above. First up is the NASA Northeast Regional Planetary Data Center at Brown University.

There are certain areas on the Brown campus where you can get the feeling of having stepped back in time. I experience that feeling when I step through Soldiers' Arch off Thayer Street to Lincoln Green (which is near the Main Green). You can't escape the telltale signs of a modern society (traffic, airplanes overhead, phone kiosks, etc), but I think it's the architecture here that takes me back to earlier days.

One of those older structures is the Lincoln Field Building. Climb to room 216 on the second floor and you're suddenly thrust into a treasure trove of science and technology. There is no better resource in New England for information on the many NASA missions. Want to research a science fair project? You could not only get a few ideas here, but also get access to the wealth of information contained in the vast reference library.

When I visit this facility I'm like a young kid in a toy or candy store. I could spend weeks here just perusing all the images returned by interplanetary spacecraft through the years (like the Pioneers, the Voyagers, Viking, Mars Global Surveyor, and Magellan, just to name but a few!!). All this data is available utilizing a variety of computers, photographic prints and slides, DVD, CD-ROM, etc.

Tours of this fascinating facility can be arranged for groups or individuals by calling the Data Manager at 401-863-3243. Depending upon availability of personnel you might even arrange a lecture by one of the professors or graduate students who work on some of NASA's missions. Skyscrapers, the Amateur Astronomical Society of Rhode Island, has held its monthly meetings at the Center from time to time, and I can tell you a visit here is something you won't soon forget.

We all realize how complex NASA missions are, and how much knowledge has been obtained from space exploration. Well, the mission statement of The Planetary Data Center is simple: "The purpose of these facilities is to make available to interested researchers, educators, and the general public the vast amount of image data obtained by the U.S. Space Program." In the mind of this space enthusiast, the Center exceeds its objectives. Check it out sometime.

If poor weather won't permit you to "keep your eyes to the skies," then in Part II we'll check out the skies at the Cormack Planetarium. Clouds never spoil the view there!!

And finally, the autumnal equinox arrives at 12:55 am EDT on September 23. Goodbye summer!!!!