



NEWSLETTER

RITTENHOUSE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1888 WWW.RITTENHOUSEASTRONOMICALSOCIETY.ORG February 2009

OPEN TO PUBLIC AND STUDENTS
Upcoming Meeting on February 11th at
7:30 PM
The Franklin
20th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway

February's Meeting:

The one night of the entire year that we were promised the planetarium for our Holst presentation has been reneged! Well, we have had the dome for most of our presentations, so it is time to fall back and punt.

Tentative Agenda

Table with 2 columns: Time and Description. Rows include: 7:15-7:30 Greetings and Introductions, Ted Williams; 7:30-7:45 Dan McCormick does a NING sign up demonstration; 7:45-8:00 Alan Daroff delivers the presidents message; 8:00-8:20 Ted Williams - Make it take it workshop; 8:20-8:30 Dr. Ken Kremer -- Mars Mission Update; 8:30-8:45 Mike Mountjoy does a presentation on the new technology installed in the Ben Franklin Memorial; 8:45-9:00 We all go to Franklin Memorial for a special multi media light presentation; 9:00 Observatory if clear.

Meeting Agenda

Table with 1 column: Time and Activity. Rows include: 7:20 - Prelude; 7:30 - Astronomy Lesson; President's Message; Sky This Month; Guest Speaker; Rooftop Observing - Weather Permitting.

January's Meeting:

Review - Dr. Ken Kremer

Fermi Gamma-Ray Space Telescope Deputy Project Scientist Dr. David J. Thompson from the NASA Goddard Spaceflight Center, Maryland presented a thrilling talk at the January 2009 monthly meeting of the Rittenhouse Astronomical Society at the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia. His talk was titled "The Fermi Gamma Ray Telescope: Viewing the Extreme Universe" with NASA's newest space telescope. Dr Thompson presented brand new and breakthrough results including the discovery of 12 new gamma ray only pulsars, which had been announced only a few days prior at the American Astronomical Society (AAS) meeting in California . Dr Thompson had a great time visiting us. He said he was very impressed with the quality of the questions from the audience which showed we were attentive and listening closely. My personal thanks to everyone for making this evening a very successful and memorable RAS club event !



Dr. Dave Thompson, from NASA Goddard Spaceflight Center in Maryland, during Q&A at the Jan 14 monthly meeting of RAS to discuss the Fermi/GLAST gamma ray space telescope

Visible Planets 01/14/2009

Table with 4 columns: Planet, Rises, Transit, Sets. Rows include: Mercury (05:36 am, 10:29 pm, 03:21 pm); Venus (08:33 am, 02:53 pm, 09:13 pm); Mars (06:13 am, 11:05 am, 03:57 pm); Jupiter (06:20 am, 11:18 am, 04:15 pm); Saturn (07:40 pm, 02:02 am, 08:24 am).



*Dr. Thompson led the team which built one of the science instruments on board Fermi, the LAT or Large Area Telescope, pictured above. Fermi was launched on 11 June 2008 from Cape Canaveral, FL on a Delta 2 rocket*



*Dr. Dave Thompson (center) from NASA Goddard with host Dr. Ken Kremer and students from Gloucester Community College (GCC) in NJ. The GCC students are members of the college Astronomy Club along with RAS Student Coordinator Dan McCormick and made a special trip to attend the RAS sponsored lecture.*



*The audience gathers up educational and outreach materials on the Fermi/GLAST mission generously distributed by our speaker, Dr. Dave Thompson.*

## Astronomy from our Network

*Ted Williams*

For members that want to know what is attracting other member's attention, recent postings on our new Networking site show a flurry of current sky sights. Comet 144P/Kushida attracted Joe Steiber's attention and his posts make you feel you are right there with him. For example Joe Posted:

"The sky was really fine, e.g., I was able to spot M35, M41 and M47 naked eye! (Sorry Ted, I couldn't spot M33 naked eye -- that's a real challenge for NJ; besides, it was starting to creep into the residual Delaware Valley sky glow in the northwest.)

Anyway, as soon as I arrived, I got out my 16x70 binoculars and was able to find 144P near the Hyades. I then set up my 12.5-inch Dob and found it. The comet was a small fuzzy patch with a bit of central condensation and it was close to a little grouping of three stars, so I was able to get a fix on its location. A couple of hours later, I checked it again, and sure enough, the comet had moved relative to the group of stars. I always get a kick out of seeing comets move against the starry background in relatively short periods of time."

A few other timely discussions have popped up on the recent Venus and Uranus conjunction, the appearance of sun pillars, and Carol has started blogging from the Bloom observatory and some of her observations of the night sky.

Although the Moon Rover did not get shown on most television broadcasts of the inaugural parade, it did not pass unrecognized by our members. U-Tube video links were established from our network site so that members could see the NASA salute to our new President (thanks to postings by Ed McCaffrey, Ken Kremer, and Mike Mountjoy.)

As a close, keep your eye on Venus which is still shining brightly at sunset; try catching it in binoculars when it grows in apparent size to 0.8 arc minutes across through mid-February (also reaching it's brightest.) It will be large enough that a great view with a pair of binoculars should be visible in early twilight. While you are at it, following the moon early in the month will show it just grazing the Pleiades cluster on the night of the 3rd.

Another spectacular pairing of the Moon and Venus is the close conjunction at the end of the month on Feb. 27. Start watching before sunset, and by the time they reach the horizon you should be able to see the revolution of the moon around the earth as it slowly drifts past Venus. Who ever catches the view, we invite you to post your observations on our members network or our website bulletin board.

## Message Center, RAS Website

Our website has a message center on the left menu bar that has been revised. There are now three message venues, two of which are established for our membership.

**Bulletin Board** - This is a page within our RAS website that is open to the public. Anyone surfing the web is liable to cross this page. It is a spot to post announcements of local astronomy happenings, place messages to our membership (that are also viewable to the public), sell or swap astronomy items, or possibly to recommend astronomy related books.

**RAS- NING** - Ning is a network that is external to our website and is only open to members of our society. This is new for 2009 (refer to article in newsletter "Ritten-Ning".) We hope it will develop into a membership benefit. It is an option for members but you are not required to join. NING provides members with an individual network page and a group or community page. It will host blogs, forums, rss feeds, pictures, videos, links and more. It will be a group effort that is shaped by our fellow members since members edit and post the content.. Keep in mind, the NING site is not open to the general public. You do not need to set up an external e-mail account (as with other services) to join in. You can set it to deliver updates to your e-mail (optional, not necessary.) Since many may not want notices filling up their boxes, you may choose to just access the site when you have the opportunity. You set your own private password.

**OFFICERS** - This is the communication center for our officers and members-at-large. It is hosted external to our website at Yahoo.com. It allows us to communicate about the tasks we are working on, setting up meetings, and to coordinate the newsletter. Members cannot access this communication tool. It required that you set up a Yahoo e-mail account to join. E-mails are delivered to the officer's e-mail of choice. We strongly encourage all officers and members-at-large that want to be actively involved with our society to be a member of this board.

## Members Networking Launch

(NING)

We launched our NING networking site to a selected group of 15 officers and members this past weekend. Ten signed up almost immediately. Dan McCormick and Ted Williams collaborated to initialize the site, design its options, color, theme and look. It already has proved to provide some amazing resources for its developers and we definitely feel it is worth signing up to take a look around. It will be provided as part of our membership benefits. Keep in mind we are all learning on the site, and



it is still in it's construction phase. We are learning how to communicate, and what to communicate through this venue. As more members sign on, it is evident that the membership will help determine what this site will develop into. It is an exciting time to join.

Joe Steiber has already posted pictures of recent conjunctions; a forum to review Ken's presentation at the December meeting has been established among other astronomy topics.

It has started off much quicker than we expected. As our group expands we feel it's value as a communication tool and a resource to share our interests will only increase.

RAS live chat is another option through our membership network. Members can chat with each other in groups, or private chats can be arranged. Members will also be provided a simple message box that is internal to the networking site. Image this as a private e-mail between members.

We have established a discussion group for Astronomy tools that are now available on WEB 2.0. We have an observers group, and Carol is keeping us in touch with happenings at the Bloom observatory.

Please consider joining one of the oldest astronomical groups in the country as it dives head forward into new technology to assist in sustaining and developing our organization. I hope to virtually chat with you soon.

## Review of Understanding the Universe An Introduction to Astronomy

2nd Edition 2007

Dr. Carol Ludolph

I just finished an amazing experience, The Teaching Company's Understanding the Universe, a 96 X thirty - minute lecture series on DVD by Professor Alex Filippenko, University of California, Berkley. You may be familiar with Professor Filippenko's appearances on the History Channel's series , The Universe. He is also involved with teaching undergraduate and graduate astronomy, as well as projects with Robotic Telescopes scanning for Type Ia supernovae, cosmology, and eclipse observing.

His presentations are entertaining, easy to follow, are filled with eye-catching computer simulations, and optional mathematics/ equations for those number crunching phobics. Having been mired in pre-med as an undergraduate, this course for me is truly happening at the right time when astronomy is making exponential strides in data acquisition in order to answer the questions of the origin of the universe(s), The Theory of Everything(TOE), and the transition in thought from Newton's to Einstein's physics. **WARNING:** This course will wet your appetite for more.

Now I am in the middle of Professor Sean Carroll's course, Dark Matter /Dark Energy. With the DVD there are no problems with "Can you repeat that?" or "Can you keep that slide up a little longer" . Both courses come with a comprehensive Guide Book with extensive but hard to get references. Remember those course outlines? If you are lucky, you have access to a university library. Dr. Filippenko even answered my email. Please check out the Website:www.TEACH12.com .

## Astronomy Outreach

*Dr. Ken Kremer*

January 2009 marked the 5th anniversary of the landing of the twin rovers Spirit and Opportunity on Jan 3 and Jan 24, 2004 as the International Year of Astronomy begins. Phoenix and the Rovers were the primary topic this month of my outreach talks to kids of all ages from elementary school students and amateur astronomers in PA and NJ. Next month I'll report on my latest Mars image mosaics published on the Feb 2009 cover of Spaceflight magazine and the Universe Today astronomy website.



*"Phoenix and the Twin Mars Rovers in 3-D" presented by Dr. Ken Kremer at Doylestown Presbyterian Church on Jan 7 to a giant crowd of over 120 very enthusiastic kids and parents with non-stop questions. Several kids plan to enter the contest to "Name NASA's next Mars Rover" open to all school children grades K-12.*



*"Daring Flight of the Phoenix & 5 Years of Mars Rovers (in 3-D)" was the title of Ken's talk to over 100 amateur astronomers and community members at the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton in Princeton, NJ on Jan 13. Ken's presentation on the East Coast to celebrate the 5TH anniversary of the rover landings was followed almost simultaneously by Rover Science Team members on the West Coast.*

Please contact me for more info or science outreach presentations by email. My upcoming Astronomy talks include:

**Rittenhouse Astronomical Society at the Franklin Institute:** Philadelphia, PA, Feb 11, 8 PM, "Mars Science Lab: NASA's Next Mars Rover".

**Riverside Elementary School, Family Astronomy Night:** Princeton, NJ, Feb 19, 6 PM. "Phoenix and the Twin Mars Rovers (in 3-D)".

**Science and Engineering Expo, Princeton University,** Princeton, NJ: March 19, 9 AM. "Phoenix and the Twin Mars Rovers (in 3-D)".

**Upper Moreland Middle School:** Hatboro, PA, Wed, March 25, 7 PM. "Mars Day Celebration: Phoenix and the Twin Mars Rovers in 3-D".

Website: [http://umtsd.org/MiddleSchool/index\\_middle\\_school.htm](http://umtsd.org/MiddleSchool/index_middle_school.htm)

Dr. Ken Kremer Email: [kremerken@yahoo.com](mailto:kremerken@yahoo.com)

NASA JPL Solar System Ambassador

Website: <http://www.rittenhouseastronomicalsociety.org/Dr.Kremer/K.htm>

Our **NEW** Mailing Address:

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