



NEWS LETTER

RITTENHOUSE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1888

WWW.RITTENHOUSEASTRONOMICALSOCIETY.ORG

September 2006

OPEN TO PUBLIC AND STUDENTS
Upcoming **Meeting on September 13th at 7:30 PM**

Fels Planetarium
The Franklin Institute
20th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway

MEMBERS NIGHT: *All call for member participation!*

Our opening meeting is traditionally a member's night. Members are invited to share, catch-up, illuminate, or demonstrate to those attending any astronomical interest, visit, or participation in an astronomical event that they would like to share. Astronomy is the general topic; members with relevance are called to share. We will have a sign up sheet the night of the meeting, and have posted a list of those signed up on our website "Meeting" page. You can sign up now, or if unsure, you can sign up the night of the meeting. Either way, contact Ted Williams if you want to get on the agenda.

Although we call this a members night, it refers to the fact that it is member driven. You do not have to be a member to attend, just possess an interest in astronomy.

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Clear skies, inside and out!

Our end-of-year field trip turned into a beautiful night under the stars. Yes, the weather, and the location came together to offer our society

members an excellent evening under clear skies both inside and out. Our spring field trip found us visiting the Mallon planetarium of the Methacton School District. It is located on the campus of the Arcola Intermediate School.

We were all treated to a full length feature presentation called *Light Years from Andromeda* driven by the Spitz ATM4 automation system. It was then we were to see double. Darkness set early inside the planetarium as we



were led through sunset on an orientation to the evening sky by the planetarium director Ted Williams. First we observed from inside, and as soon as it was just barely dark enough, we repeated our orientation outside (8:40 PM, an early but eventful start.) It was as if the sun set twice that evening.

As we stepped out we were greeted by dusk with Jupiter in full view and the summer triangle just barely cutting through the twilight of the beautiful June evening sky. The crowd picked out the brightest stars one at a time as soon as they popped through the twilight. Arcturus first, then Saturn kicked off the view. Green lasers helped everyone quickly get oriented to their direction. Our visiting students were the first to find Polaris! Telescopes were ready and we had front row seats to the moons of Jupiter and Saturn's ring (Cassini's divide included.) We were adequately prepared for the view after seeing space probe pictures taken during flybys of both planets previously in the planetarium. Now we could witness those worlds with our own eyes.

Much thanks to society members Dave Walker and Carol Ludolf for sharing that view with their telescopes, and also thanks to Alan Daroff who was there to assist anyone with information about the views at hand.

At the end of the evening, we were packing in our gear after most of our visitors had left, and a few of our members moved around to the far soccer fields beside the buildings. We were just practicing pointing out the constellations of the upcoming summer sky, with no telescopes. We used the combination of our lasers to mark out locations of deep sky objects. Using the visible beams as guides we had other observers point their binoculars to the exact spot to check out the view. We were trying to see how many we could get each other to pick out with the binoculars. It was remarkable how clear the evening was, and yet the lasers could still trace a faint path guiding observers with their binoculars to the proper location of the Ring Nebula, the great globular cluster and also the wild duck cluster.

We will attempt this again at future meetings from the Institute rooftop to see if we can get others to find star clusters that may be difficult to see with binoculars from downtown!

Then, as we were gazing around the sky, I think almost all spied simultaneously the reflection of sunlight off the International Space Station passing overhead. Spotting it about 40 degrees above the horizon, we were treated to

an amazing view as the Space Station crossed the sky at an 85 degree angle of altitude. We had already verified it would be crossing the sky about 10:37 PM that evening, and the NASA website predicted the event perfectly. It was a great finale to a beautiful night. If you want to see the site we used, it's on our website on the Astronomical Interest page. Follow the satellite link.

Mike Mountjoy

Visible Planets September 13, 2006

Mercury	Transit 1:36 PM	Set 7:40 PM
Venus	Rise 5:40 AM	Set 6:50 PM
Mars	Transit 1:44 PM	Set 7:44 PM
Jupiter	Transit 4:22 PM	Set 9:30 PM
Saturn	Transit 4:02 AM	Set 5:56 PM

EDUCATION INITIATIVE

In an effort to further student participation in our society, we will be establishing a student chapter at the new Science Leadership Academy (SLA) that is opening this fall in Philadelphia.



Our host institution, the Franklin Institute, has entered into a partnership with the Philadelphia School District to create the S.L.A.. Our organization has been invited to get involved. Chris Lehmann has been designated as the principal of the Academy, and currently maintains his office at the Franklin Institute. I was afforded the opportunity to meet with Mr. Lehmann early in the summer to discuss how the Rittenhouse Astronomical Society might be able to assist.

Students will be invited to attend our meetings starting this October. To encourage participation, we have been asked to send representatives from our organization with a background in Astronomy to meet with the new students at their school. We discussed the possibility of meeting 2 weeks prior to each of our meetings to share an astronomy lesson that would be related to the upcoming meeting.

We also discussed the possibility of providing astronomy lessons that would be in alignment with the Pennsylvania State Standards that address Science Education and Astronomy when the students were attending at the planetarium.

Currently a group of students visit us each month from Bodine High School. Mr. Carl Cohen coordinates that

effort. To aid both groups with astronomy education, we are considering starting our meetings with a small astronomy lesson related to the state standards. Not only will this benefit currently interested students that already participate, but it will serve as an incentive for other students from the Philadelphia area to attend.

If you would like to get involved and be one of our representatives, please contact me at one of our upcoming meetings. We will be working on a small agenda of lessons that will be prepared for all to learn from. I will share more of our ideas with the members at our upcoming member's night.

Ted Williams

ASTRONOMY COURSES

Have you ever wanted to take a course in Astronomy either for your own enjoyment or for professional development? In today's technology rich world, you don't even have to leave the comfort of your home to either confirm your knowledge or advance your knowledge in the field of Astronomy.

There are many choices ranging from on-line courses to independent study courses that you can take. Some may be accredited courses from institutes of higher learning. You can earn credits to advance professionally or meet a states' requirement for educational professional development. Others are non-credit and geared to expand ones knowledge. Here is a web site that provides links to many sites that offer a variety of choices:

<http://www.worldwidelearn.com/onlinecourses/astronomy-course.htm>

Sometimes, there are courses offered that are buried in an institutes' offerings such as Fresno Pacific University's extensive "Center for Professional Development" that offers post bachelors courses that are not a part of a degree, but merely to provide opportunities for professional development. One such course is SCI - 917 Astronomy: Our Solar System (formerly - Astronomy: For All Ages). Fresno Pacific University offers affordable graduate level courses with support from a very professional faculty and staff.

Ruth List

Ruth List will be available at the upcoming September meeting to collect dues for the 2006-2007 academic year.

Our Mailing Address:

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Checks are made out to "Rittenhouse Astronomical Society"