

THE FAINT FUZZY

The Official Newsletter of the West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers
January 2007

UPCOMING MEETING:

Our next meeting will be Saturday January 20th at 7 p.m. at Golden Pond Observatory. As always visitors are welcome to attend! If the sky is clear, we will view after the meeting.

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:

Nine people attended the last meeting including two visitors, Ken Billings and his fiancé Sue, both from Clarksville. They weren't visitors for long – they joined the club after the meeting!

Star Party: David Paessler provided an update on star party income. All extra T-shirts have been sold. Money for pre-ordered T-shirts still needs to be collected from Laura Dietrich and Jackie Mathis. We also still need to collect \$90 for half the cost of the extra porta-potty clean-out.

LBL Volunteer Party: Thanks to Jim and Sandy Phfistner for representing the club at this event! They reported that LBL Director of Operations Jim Taylor welcomed them and thanked the club for its support of the Summer Nights program. He also requested that the club write a monthly journal entry for the LBL website. Jim and Sandy suggested that Bob or Melissa Vickers might be willing to take this on. David noted that he has written a few articles for the LBL website in the past.

[The club's actual participation in this will be discussed at a future meeting.]

Miscellaneous: David noted that new club members who join after the star party will get credit for 2007 membership dues. Sandy Phfistner suggested that we put up a sign at the back entrance to Golden Pond so visitors or new members can more easily find the observatory. David purchased a new coffee pot for the club.

Goodies: Thanks to Jim & Sandy Phfistner for bringing cookies and apple cider! They were delicious!

Viewing: We were able to view for a short time before the clouds rolled in.

WKAA 2006 YEAR-IN-REVIEW:

Club Membership, Attendance, & Money:

- Fifteen people attended each club meeting on average, with a high of 24 at the March potluck dinner/elections and a low of 9 at the December meeting.
- Twelve new members joined the club. A few past members signed up again and several people on the club roster didn't renew their membership. The result was a net gain of 2 club members. This is a significant improvement over 2005 in which the club had a net loss of 5 members and only gained 5 new members.
- Our treasury has \$869 more than this time last year. This is up from 2005, in which the treasury gained about \$400.

Club Events:

- The star party was a success again this year – but it was a cliffhanger. The first Saturday night was clear, but then we endured rain or cloudy weather most of the rest of the week. Wednesday and Friday nights were clear and most of the day on Saturday was pretty. Attendance was pretty low until Friday. In the end we had 44 single and family parties register – up from 39 parties last year. Even with the bad weather, this year's star party made a small profit.
- FYBO III Winter Star Party was also a success – 3 people came, froze (as promised) and stayed up late viewing wonderful clear skies on Saturday night.
- In addition to the usual potluck dinner in March and chili supper in November, the club had a picnic in September to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Public Outreach:

- The club earned 2nd runner-up for a national public outreach award from Astronomy Magazine.
- Astronomy Day was really good this year. There was a lot of club support, interesting activities, and nice weather. The crowd was smaller than in some years, but the participants seemed to all have a good time.
- Club member support for LBL's Summer Nights was high this year and well-organized, but attendance by the public seemed to be down. Also three "How to Use Your Telescope" sessions for the public did not have any takers.
- Only a few additional public events were scheduled this year, down from 15-20 last year. Hopefully we will be able to host more "sidewalk astronomy" events in 2007.

Observing & Equipment:

- The weather was pretty lousy for observing this year similar to 2005. Very few club meeting nights were clear enough to get in much observing.
- Two members earned a total of 3 Astronomical League observing awards this year. Two certificates were earned last year, so we have been consistent.
- David Paessler rebuilt his 16-inch Dob into a new slick & much lighter version. See the [WCAA Photo Gallery](#) for step-by-step photos.
- Ross Workman also built a new scope with deep sky objects beautifully painted on the base.

Recognition of Club Members:

- Several club members provided outstanding leadership and new ideas this year. These include Bob and Melissa Vickers – Public Outreach Award; Heather Shearbourne – Summer Nights & Astronomy Day; Jim and Sandy Phfistner – 20th Anniversary Picnic and Astronomy Day; Bill Kassenbaum – Twin Lakes Star Party.
- New observer and club member Harold Meyers really took up amateur astronomy with a passion. He attended nearly all club meetings, setting up his scope on even marginal nights, and he observes very frequently at home as well.
- Several club members continued their longtime club leadership including David Paessler, Ross Workman, Bill Kassebaum and Dale & Carol Baltimore.

FIELD OF ASTRONOMY 2006 YEAR-IN-REVIEW:

A few of the highlights (reported by [SkyTonight.com](#)) are:

- The International Astronomical Union voted to demote Pluto from a full-fledged planet to a minor planet.
- Pluto's two new moons, discovered in 2005, were named this year – Nix and Hydra.
- Images shot 6 years apart by the Mars Global Surveyor showed surface changes that may indicate recently flowing water on the red planet.
- The Mars Global Surveyor finally fell silent in November after operating for about 10 years.
- Jupiter developed a new junior Red Spot.
- Periodic Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann 3 was observed breaking apart into several pieces.
- The Stardust probe returned back to earth after spending months collecting interplanetary debris.
- Hawaiian observatories were rocked by a large earthquake but suffered no major damage.
- After a long budget battle NASA agreed to save the Hubble Space Telescope and has scheduled a servicing mission for 2008.
- After 3 years the Mars rovers continued to send back fabulous photos and valuable data throughout 2006.

ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE (AL) AWARDS:

There are no pending awards or submissions at this time. See www.astroleague.org for more information about observing clubs/awards. Also see wkaa.net for a list of club members who have completed awards. Contact David if you have any questions.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Balance (1/17/07): \$3033.52

PUBLIC VIEWING:

Princeton & Caldwell County: The Princeton library and Caldwell County Elementary School have both contacted Ross Workman about doing sidewalk programs this spring. No dates have been set yet.

Paducah: David is working with the McCracken County Public Library to schedule a public viewing session for late February or early March.

OTHER EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Officer Elections: Elections will be held at the March meeting. Are you well organized? Do you have new ideas? Then consider running for a club office! The positions are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Star Party Coordinator, and Assistant Star Party Coordinator.

Club Activities Schedule: The 2007 schedule has been posted on the club website. See www.wkaa.net for details.

Loaner Scopes: The club has two Dobsonians (6" and 8") available for club members to borrow. Anyone who has been a club member for 6 months, completes a training/safety session, and signs a written agreement may borrow one of the scopes.

Library: The club has several books and magazines available for reference or check out. Come and peruse the titles at the observatory.

Magazine Discounts: Club members who subscribe to *Sky and Telescope* or *Astronomy* magazines through the club receive a discount! Annually you can save \$10 on *Sky and Tel* and \$9 on *Astronomy*. Turn in your renewals to David Paessler in order to receive the discount.

CLUB OFFICERS LIST:

President, Ross Workman – Dawson Springs, KY 270-797-8959 planetman[[@](mailto:planetman@bellsouth.net)]bellsouth.net

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Clear skies,

Dale & Carol Baltimore