



December 2017

Editor -Jack Fritz

The St. Petersburg Astronomy Club, has been the center of family astronomy in the Tampa Bay Area for decades. Its 247 adult members are dedicated to promoting and sharing the wonders and science of astronomy. We host dark-sky and local star parties, telescope-making workshops, science lectures, astronomy lectures, educational outreach sessions and much more.

President's Message

KYLE BRINKMAN

★ Last month I missed the club meeting. I was on a journey and fulfilled one of my lifelong dreams to see the pyramids of the Mayan empire. The Mayans built the pyramids for their religious rituals which also involved the creation of a complex calendar based upon the stars. Their studies of astronomy resulted in the invention of calculus centuries before Isaac Newton. They knew the world was round and were able to predict eclipses with great accuracy. Had the Spanish read the books instead of burning them they would have a treasure greater than the silver and gold they took.



The calendar was an invention in many cultures around the world. All calendars are based upon the position of the stars. The Egyptians had a calendar of twelve 30-day months and five festival days. Their new year was when the star Sirius first appeared signaling the upcoming flooding of the Nile. The Babylonian new year started in the Spring around the equinox. Our new year may have once been based upon the winter solstice, December 21st. The old Roman calendar was 365 days and didn't have a leap year until Julius

Caesar introduced it. The months and seasons would drift apart over centuries so that December could have become a month in the Fall as opposed to Winter.

This time of year is a great time to reflect on the accomplishments of the last year and focus on the upcoming opportunities that a new year brings. 2017 was a great year for the club. We had fantastic weather at OBS. We had some interesting programs. New telescopes were built in the mirror lab. Who can forget the North American Eclipse of 2017? 2018 is going to be another wonderful year. There will be more discoveries that expand our knowledge.

I, like many of you, find that my calendar gets booked this time of year. On top of work, family, and everyday life there are holiday parties at work, with friends and our club. Be sure to make some time to get outside at night and enjoy the natural lights up above.

There are many reasons to celebrate this time of year. The club and I sincerely hope you enjoy your favorite holiday.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

New Members

We would like to welcome Chad Thompson and Bruce Berger to our family of members.

General Meeting

This month's general meeting and Annual Christmas Party will take place on Friday, December 15th at 7:00 PM, at the Science Center of Pinellas County, 7701 22nd Ave. N, St. Petersburg, FL. **Please note that this is the third Friday and we meet one hour earlier than normal.**

Main Program - Annual Christmas party. As usual, it's pot-luck. So, bring a covered dish and celebrate with us.

Orange Blossom Special

Our annual star party will be February 7th - 11th, 2018. We do not have a food vendor this year, so you need to be prepared to provide all your own food.

We're planning a catered bar-b-que, for Saturday night, with \$10/head donations. The club could pick up any additional costs.

We only have a limited number of campsites on the field with electricity, and they are assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis so you may want to register early. Go to www.OrangeBlossomSpecial.org/ for more information.

January Astronomical Events

JACK FRITZ

January 1 - Mercury at Greatest Western Elongation. The planet Mercury reaches greatest western elongation of 22.7 degrees from the Sun. This is the best time to view Mercury since it will be at its highest point above the horizon in the morning sky. Look for the planet low in the eastern sky just before sunrise.

January 2 - Full Moon, Super-moon. The Moon will be located on the opposite side of the Earth as the Sun, and its face will be fully illuminated. This phase occurs at 02:24 UTC. This full moon was known by early Native

American tribes as the Full Wolf Moon because this was the time of year when hungry wolf packs howled outside their camps. This moon has also been known as the Old Moon and the Moon After Yule. It is also the first of two super-moons for 2018. The Moon will be at its closest approach to the Earth and may look slightly larger and brighter than usual.

January 3rd, and 4th - Quadrantids Meteor Shower. The Quadrantids is an above average shower, with up to 40 meteors per hour at its peak. It is thought to be produced by dust grains left behind by an extinct comet known as 2003 EH1, which was discovered in 2003. The shower runs annually from January 1-5. It peaks this year on the night of the 3rd and morning of the 4th. Unfortunately, the nearly full Moon will block out all but the brightest meteors this year. If you are patient, you should still be able to catch some of the brightest ones. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Boötes, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

January 17th - New Moon. The Moon will be located on the same side of the Earth as the Sun and will not be visible in the night sky. This phase occurs at 02:17 UTC. This is the best time of the month to observe faint objects such as galaxies and star clusters because there is no moonlight to interfere.

January 31st - Full Moon, Super-moon, Blue Moon. The Moon will be located on the opposite side of the Earth as the Sun, and its face will be fully illuminated. This phase occurs at 13:27 UTC. Since this is the second full moon in the same month, it is sometimes referred to as a blue moon. This is also the last of two super-moons for 2018. The Moon will be at its closest approach to the Earth and may look slightly larger and brighter than usual.

Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

KELLY ANDERSON

For those of you who weren't there, you missed it! We had the best seeing that I've ever seen at Withlacoochee River Park.

Friday afternoon, after three days of stunningly clear weather, Joe Canzoneri, Ron Wayman, Blake Harding, Franklin Matos, Mike Partain (and friends) and your intrepid Field Reporter eagerly anticipated a good night of viewing and imaging. I was in my little tent just beginning an imaging run when the auto-tracker stopped working! Poking my head out of the tent to see what was happening, I saw that clouds had appeared like magic, covering almost the entire sky. We figured someone bought something new to jinx us.

Fortunately, the Cloud Imps were only messing with us. After one-half hour, the clouds just as magically vanished, and we enjoyed incredibly good viewing the rest of the night. I captured the Helix and Dumbbell Nebulae while Joe managed to get a stunning Veil Nebula, among others. Mike's 11-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain hopped from one awesome sight to another.

Coincidentally it was also the peak of the Leonid Meteor Shower. Mike reported seeing six meteors, while I managed to keep my string of zero meteors unbroken. Ron got up about 4:00 am to set up his camera to capture some bright streaks and reported seeing several very bright ones. By that time, the rest of us saw the insides of our eyelids.

It was a fun night of astronomy and fellowship.

Bill and Nancy Huff came out for a few hours Saturday afternoon to visit. Shane Eigel and few more astronomers joined us for the evening. We were also joined by about 30 campers who were curious about what we were doing. As usual in such occasions, the "Wows!" were popping out on a regular basis. It's always

fun to show people some of the astronomical wonders that keep us up nights.

The Orion Nebula viewed through a 16-inch Dobsonian was magnificent! I highly recommend it.

Sunday morning began clear and bright, but by early afternoon the cloud monsters were back, and the drizzles had begun. Time to go home and think about the December New Moon weekend. We will gaggle again December 15 through 17. Come out and join us, even if only for a few hours. I guarantee clear skies and awesome sights.

Mirror Lab

RALPH CRAIG

★ We got four mirrors back from Spectrum Coatings in Deltona, and they look very nice as usual.



We have two mirrors being worked on right now. Paul is in the final figuring stage on his 14" re-melt of a 12" blank and Dimitri is ready to start figuring his thin 12" mirror.

Brent and Joey came by the lab to line up their scope which is almost finished and also some other people to get their telescopes collimated.



Brent & Joey

Pete from Georgia came down and joined the lab to grind a 10-inch mirror which he plans to do most of the work on at home.



Group Mirror Grinding

We were also visited by Bruce Berger from the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston group (atmob.org). He is an accomplished astronomer who had seen our website and stopped by for a visit to see our lab and the Robotic Foucault tester. He has joined the club and may come to some of the meetings as he occasionally comes down here to visit family.

Pictures are on the mirror lab web page, <http://www.telescopelab.com> and Mike Davis's web page, <http://www.mdpub.com>, and also on Allen Maroney's web page <http://www.knology.net/amaroney>.

Outreach

JIM HUNTER

★ Little Manatee River Park. - Kelly Anderson gave an astronomy talk for about 50 people, including about 25 from a senior center nearby. We had mist off and on but snuck in a few views of Saturn. Overall a poor night.

Steve Gabor and I did the Great American Teach-in at Brooker Creek Elementary and Literacy Academy, respectively.

Scott Walsh reported on November 18th Gulfport Outreach. Greg Simpson, Diane, and Scott Walsh, SPAC members, brought out our

big scopes, Celestron HD 11 inch SC scope and 12 inch Orion truss Dobsonian. scope.



Kids enjoying the view with Greg



Scott & Dian Walsh

The weather was clear until about 9 PM when annoying clouds rolled in. Viewed Saturn, Uranus, Albireo, Vega, Altair and the M15 cluster under extremely bright lights at Gulfport. Patrons enjoyed the wonderful views and appreciated Club members donating their time and equipment for this event.

SPAC Business Meeting 

Our next business meeting is Wednesday, January 10th, at 8:00 PM at the Science Center. All interested members are invited to attend. All club business decisions are made at the business meeting so as not to encumber the general meeting.

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Click on the name to send email

Recognition of Patrons & Benefactors:

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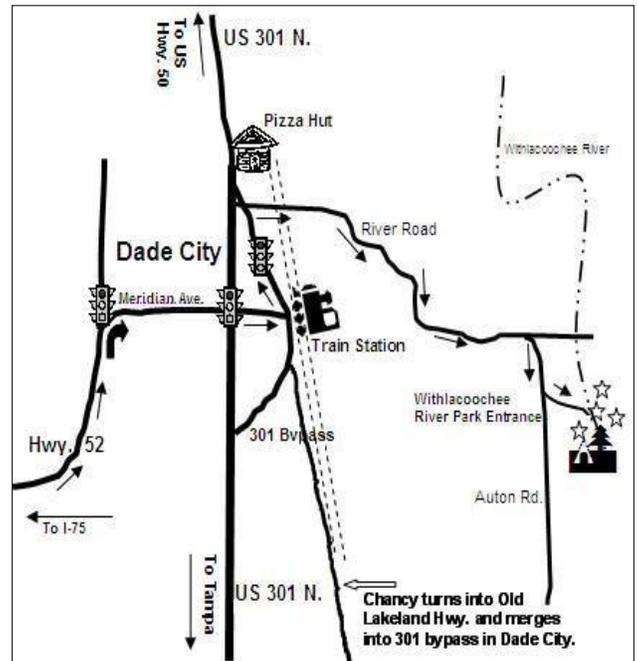
Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

Our next New Moon Weekend falls on December 15th and 16th.

The park gate is locked at Sundown, so you will need to arrive before then. The year-round camping fee with electrical use is

\$10/night for club members and \$20 for non-members. Tent camping without electric is \$5/night.

Be reminded that if you are not camping, you must pay the \$2/vehicle fee. Vehicles displaying the handicap parking tag are exempt. For further information, contact Bill or Nancy Huff. starhopr3@msn.com or 813 621-3606.



Withlacoochee River Park - Dade City, FL

Detailed directions can be found at: www.StPeteAstronomyClub.org



15406 Stonecreek Lane
Tampa, FL 33613

SPAC, INC. MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in St. Petersburg Astronomy Club, Inc. is open to anyone, regardless of age, who is interested in astronomy. Dues are considered donations and are non-refundable. Membership options are available as listed below:

To join or renew your membership:

Complete the following form and return it with your payment to: Jim Hunter - Treasurer, 17316 Oak Ledge Dr., Lutz, FL 33549-7626 - Telephone number (813) 909-7013 (checks should be made payable to SPAC, Inc.)

Name: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Spouse: _____ Children (*Under 18*): _____

Address: _____ City: _____ St. ____ Zip: _____

E-Mail address: _____ Newsletter Preference: Email [] US Mail [] \$25

Single: [] \$ 30.00/YR. Includes one adult, minor children, the "SPACE" newsletter, and all the rights and privileges of membership.

Family: [] \$ 35.00/YR. Includes two adults, minor children and the above rights and privileges.

Patron: [] \$ 50.00/YR. A Patron member is entitled to the above rights and privileges.

Benefactor: [] \$100.00/YR. A Benefactor member is entitled to the above rights and privileges.

US Mail: [] \$ 25.00/YR. Please include \$25 if you choose to have the newsletter via US Mail.