



January 2018

Editor -Jack Fritz

The St. Petersburg Astronomy Club, has been the center of family astronomy in the Tampa Bay Area for decades. Its 260 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

★ Many cultures have superstitions of mischievous creatures that play tricks on people such as leprechauns and gremlins. Those sprites and pixies used to explain all the strange happenings around us that we didn't understand. If a crop failed, it could be witchcraft. Lost a goat? Must be a Chupacabra. As understanding grew, those superstitions are put aside. We congratulate ourselves for living in an enlightened age where we know that these don't exist.



Did we put the nonsense aside in 2017? Just last month an asteroid was seen hurtling through our solar system. It was large and oblong. Many objects of its mass are round. It is right to turn our telescopes to look at a wondering asteroid of peculiar characteristics. How quick were people to say "we don't understand it? Therefore, it must be aliens." Did we not learn from the pile of salt on Ceres? People saw a bright reflection on a grey round asteroid and thought it was an alien city. How about that alien megastructure around a distant star that caused unusual dimming? It turned out to be a dust cloud.

My Dad and I go to star parties together. There was a terrible storm in Chiefland on the first night of a party two years ago. We went into town to stay overnight and have dinner. Naturally, we found ourselves at a bar. We were talking with a farmer who told us about his frightening experience only the year before. He was out in his field at night when he saw all these green lights coming down from the clouds. He was sure the mothership was coming down. My Dad looks at me, and we bust out laughing. There was a cloudy night the year prior when everyone on the field with a green laser pointer pointed them up at the sky and waved them around. We were his aliens!

It would be foolish to think that life doesn't exist elsewhere. Given the right tools, time and inspiration it will be found. It is just going to take serious effort. The nut on Ancient Aliens isn't going to do it.

The truth is out there. It's probably not aliens.

Keep looking up

New Members

We would like to welcome Germaine Knapp, Andrew Moore & Christine Bourgoin, Leonard Ginn, Jennifer Strawder, Eric Aranda, Barry Fox & Wherrie Rutland, Judy Terwilliger, Jorge Morales, and Jamie Kenas to our family of members.

General Meeting

This month's general meeting will take place on Friday, January 26th at 8:00 PM, at the Science Center of Pinellas County, 7701 22nd Ave. N, St. Petersburg, FL.

Orange Blossom Special

JACK FRITZ

★ The plans for this year's annual star party have been completed, and registration is closed. If you have not yet registered, you will have to wait until next year.

We do not have a food vendor this year, so you need to be prepared to provide your own meals except for Saturday night. We're planning fried chicken with all the trimmings.

I have enjoyed serving on the OBS Star Party committee, but the time has come for me to step down. This will be my last year as committee chair. We are looking for new leadership to keep the great tradition going.

Editor's Notes

JACK FRITZ

★ These past 30 days have been great for the growth of our club. Our membership has increased to 258 adult members. A net gain of 11 members.

Congratulations to our newest Director-at-Large, David Richmond. He replaces Allen Maroney who has served in that capacity for many years. Allen, thank you for all you have done and continue to do, to make our club great.

February Astronomical Events

STEVE ROBBINS

Thursday, February 1st, Regulus will be 0.9° south of the Moon.

Sunday, the 11th, the Moon is at apogee, 405,700 km from Earth.

Thursday, February 15th, a partial eclipse of the Sun will be visible in southern South America, parts of the southern Pacific Ocean and Antarctica. It's summer down there!

Friday, the 23rd Aldebaran will be 0.7° south of the Moon.

Tuesday, February 27th, the Moon is at perigee, 363,900 km from Earth.

Also on February 27th, the Beehive Cluster will be 2.3° north of the Moon for a great wide field photo opportunity.

February doesn't have a full Moon. The full moons of January 31st and March 1st flank the month.

Moon Phases for February

- 7th - Third Quarter
- 15th - New Moon
- 23rd - First Quarter

Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

KELLY ANDERSON

★ We've had two New Moon weekends since the last report. Viewing was a bit challenging for the last New Moon of 2018. Patience was rewarded with some pretty good views, but the overhead "window" tended to change locations and sizes requiring some flexibility of target choices.

Friday night your intrepid reporter was joined by Ron & Dee Wayman, Jack Fritz, Allen and Betsy Force, and Shane Eigell. Overhead we had various, and sundry clouds drift by, so cloud avoidance was somewhat problematical.

Later in the evening, it was mostly clear except for a high, thin layer of wispieness that tended to give things astronomical a pretty halo. Not ideal but enjoyable nonetheless.

Daytime weather was pleasant with reasonable temperatures and light breezes. Friday night dipped down to the upper 40s, Saturday night about 10 degrees warmer.

With the frontal passage on mid-day Saturday, we were sure that clear skies would be

right behind. We were wrong. Again with the clouds drifting by, but at least the clear spots were much better than the previous evening. Shane and Allen worked on optimizing their new imaging gear, mostly with success. I captured some nice widefield shots that I'll share on Facebook. I haven't done a lot of imagery with camera and lens only and enjoyed the learning experience.



Thin Layer of Wispiness

There are some who might say that the reason I was using just the camera was that I had forgotten to bring my telescope. Don't believe them ... I left my scope at home on purpose. Really.

Space Exploration News

STEVE ROBBINS

★ We'll sneak in an out-of-bounds prediction here. On Sunday, January 21st, about a half hour after midnight, there will be a lunar transit of the ISS, visible in the Brooksville/Spring Hill area. Go to transit-finder.com for details. Be sure to do the initial search for St Petersburg, then refine the time with a second search for the actual address from which you will do your observations.

Have trace fossils been found on Mars? Curiosity spotted some tubular structures 1mm wide and 5mm long that bend like an earthworm, but hundreds of times smaller.

Although fossils can't be ruled out, closer inspection has found a faceted nature to the shapes, probably relating to a non-biological crystal structure. Unfortunately, Curiosity is not equipped to determine their nature. Even on Earth, sedimentary fossils are very difficult to identify.

We're one year out. On January 1, 2019, New Horizons will do the [most distant flyby](#) and close inspection of a solar system object, Kuiper Belt object MU69. Going for broke, New Horizons will fly three times closer to MU69 than it did to Pluto for even more detailed views of this mysterious object.

Mirror Lab

RALPH CRAIG

★ Paul finished his 14-inch f 4.4 fast mirror this month. It was challenging to do such a fast mirror, but Paul managed to pull it off.



Paul's Picture of Perfection

Dimitri's 12-inch mirror, the only one currently in-work, is in the final figuring stage. Several of the members who have recently finished mirrors are assembling their telescopes at the lab. We will see if any of them finish in time for this year's OBS Star Party.

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>.

Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

KELLY ANDERSON

★ Our first New Moon Weekend of 2018, got the year off to a pretty good start. Joe Canzoneri showed up a day early on Thursday, only to stare at the bottoms of clouds. Jack Fritz, Mark & Sharon Burns, Blake Harding, Ron & Dee Wayman, Allen & Betsy Force and your intrepid Field Reporter arrived on Friday, making it a pretty good group for what turned out to be a nice weekend for observing.

A clearing trend began Friday afternoon, but it clouded up a bit early in the evening. By 9:00, however, it had cleared up fairly well. By late evening it had cleared almost completely.

I checked out the skies at 4:00 AM Saturday morning and was treated with fabulous seeing. I spied the conjunction of Jupiter and Mars. They were so close that Mars looked almost like a fifth Galilean moon, but I could just separate them using only my Mark 1A1 eyeballs, such as they are. Venus and Mercury made short appearances just before dawn.

Saturday night started out well enough, but a massive overcast very quickly arrived and we all thought observing would be a bust. In disgust, I returned to my mobile hovel to watch the Vikings - Saints football game. Being a Minnesota boy, I was amazed and delighted to watch the Vikes win it with the last play of the game. Sorry New Orleans fans. There's always next year.

When I poked my head out of the trailer, I discovered the cloud deck had moved out as quickly as it had arrived, and we were left with some very good seeing. It was cold and dry, with almost no dew until the frost appeared in the early hours.

Several of us stayed over Sunday night and it, also, was a stellar evening. Lots of good astronomy to be had all weekend, and it looks like it'll stay that way all week.

I'd like to end this missive on a personal note: it was not a good weekend for me, equipment-wise. On Friday evening my AVX mount refused to work, claiming a #17 error. Apparently, this code is generated when the motor control board is feeling poorly. So, no imaging for me that night, but undaunted, I drove home Saturday morning to pick up my CGEM (the Beast ... it's a heavy thing but bulletproof). Or so I thought.

As it turned out, the power socket was broken. Now here's the thing: as soon as it became known that I had this problem, five guys appeared to help. Joe and Jack came up with an idea for a temporary fix, and between the rest of the group, we were able to come up with the parts and tools to make it work.

That's what makes this club so great ... our members will offer help at the drop of a hat, no hesitation, and they enjoy doing it. Got a question? Just ask. Need a little mentoring? It's yours. This is a great astronomy club, and it's an honor to be a member. Thanks to all for their help. Broken equipment notwithstanding, I had a great weekend.



Ron Wayman's Running Man

SPAC Business Meeting 

Our next business meeting is Wednesday, February 14th, 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.

Officers & Directors

President:	Kyle Brinkman	727 455-6931
Vice Pres.:	Jack Fritz	813 508-5680
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Outreach Chair:	Jim Hunter	813 909-7013
Librarian:	Ralph Craig	727 384-2086
Club Webmaster:	Chris Curran	813 653-2604

Click on the name to send email

Recognition of Patrons & Benefactors:

Clifford B. Benham	Benefactor
Jack & Roni Fritz	Benefactor
Gus Waffan	Benefactor
Andy Demartini	Patron
Anthony Staiano	Patron
Brad & Lisa Perryman	Patron
David & Mina Swan	Patron
Joe & Diane Ortiz-Bradley	Patron
Kyle Brinkman	Patron
Matt Labadie	Patron
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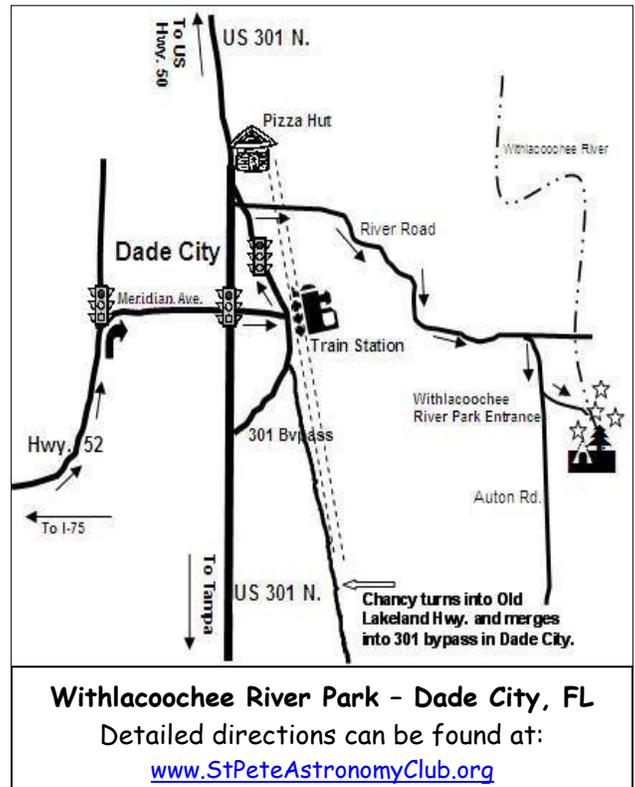
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Mirror Lab	Ralph Craig	727 384-2086

Withlacoochee New Moon Weekend

Our next New Moon Weekend falls on March 16th and 17th. February's New Moon is our annual star Party and you must have pre-registered to attend.

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.





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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.

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