



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

April 2001

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

March's Speaker

Thanks to cosmic ambulance chaser **Chris Butler** from ² Hydrae for taking us on a voyage to the local stars last month!

April's Meeting

The April meeting will be an **open member meeting**. Think about items you would like to present to the membership. Anything is valid, as long as it pertains to the AU and its activities. No sales pitches, product endorsements, or non-astronomical topics will be permitted. Members will have five minutes on the floor to present their items. A member may have two opportunities to speak before the membership. After speaking once you'll have to wait for two other speakers before taking the floor again. The AU is your club so we hope you will present ideas and activities which will involve all members. After the member presentations, there will be entertainment.

Volunteers!!!

The month since the last newsletter (Feb. 23 – Mar. 23) was a really busy one for outreach events, but our volunteers rose to the occasion. Thanks to Andreas (via Chris Baer), Bob Brown, Warren Bitters, Gretchen & Greg Brinser, Joe Doyle, Arthur Harris, Janie & Marv Johnson, June Kelley, Pat McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Craig Prater, and Wayne Rothermich for service above and beyond the call of duty. Thanks to these dedicated outreachies, we showed the sky to **961** customers.

April looks much quieter. As always, outreach schedules are subject to change, so check the web page or contact Edgar or Chuck to find out the latest.

AU Events Coming Up

Friday, April 6, 7:30 PM – AU monthly meeting in Farrand Hall at SBMNH.

Monday, April 9, 7:30 PM – Reach for the Stars. **David Levy** (see below) will speak at SBMNH, and we will have telescopes set up outside. Volunteers willing to bring a scope and run it for an hour or so after David Levy's lecture will receive free admission to Reach for the Stars! Contact Steve, Edgar, or Chuck to volunteer, as telescope space is limited.

Saturday, April 14, 8:30 PM – Monthly Star Party at SBMNH.

Friday, April 20, 7:30 PM – Monthly Public Observation at Westmont.

Saturday, April 21, dusk – Dark Sky at the Gun Club and/or Figueroa Mountain. Make sure someone else will be there before you go!

Saturday, April 28, all day – Astronomy Day in Chase Palm Park along the beach. Contact Steve or Edgar to volunteer.

Jim and Sir Arthur, Again

AU member Jim Williams is back from his trip to Sri Lanka. It was so hot and humid that only his hotmail account would work for email. He's scheduled to tell us all about it for the **May** AU meeting.

Reach for the Stars

Monday, April 9, 7:30 p.m., at SBMNH in Fleischmann Auditorium. Nationally acclaimed astronomer David Levy shares his 40-year-long

passion for the night sky. One of history's most successful comet hunters, with 21 discoveries to his credit, Levy will share the excitement of scientific inquiry, as well as his infatuation with the awesome delights of the universe. He will talk about the discovery of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, which later collided with Jupiter in one of the most spectacular celestial displays in modern history.

After the presentation, enjoy a close up look at the night sky through large amateur telescopes operated by members of the Astronomical Unit. The evening includes a book sale and signing. This program is co-sponsored by Raytheon. Advance tickets are available in the Museum Admissions Office beginning March 20. Museum Members, AU Members, and Students with ID \$8; Non-Members \$10.

Tony's Famous (Again)

Tony Galván, our esteemed President and avid astrophotographer, has a half-page photo featured in the **May issue of *Sky & Telescope***, appearing as an illustration for an article entitled "Superior Moments for Inferior Planets." Tony's images have been selected by several astronomy publications.

Is It Dark Yet?

Rolling **electrical blackouts** have finally come to the Santa Barbara area. It's not all bad news, however. In an effort to improve their public image, Southern Cal Edison is offering a special service to all active members of astronomy clubs. Here's how it works, according to corporate spokesman Phineas Ocular: Just call them at 555-0401 to schedule a blackout in your neighborhood. Have your AU membership card handy when you call, because they'll want proof that you're a current amateur astronomer!

Bye, Bye Mir

The LA Times ran the following photo of Mir cosmonaut Sergei Avdeyev relaxing at the Sheraton in Fiji, where he went to observe the demise of the

Russian space station. Sergei came and talked to us about his experiences aboard Mir at a special event sponsored by the AU in August of 1997, thanks to the efforts of AU members Dr. Charles Markham and Dr. Shirley Diamond.



Associated Press
Sergei V. Avdeyev, a cosmonaut who spent a total of 748 days on Mir, relaxes in Fiji, where he awaits the reentry of the spacecraft.

More Outreach Fun

If you've always wondered what attending an outreach event was like, but were afraid to ask, here's what June Kelley had to say about the IDP event at the Bacara: "I don't believe it!", "Is that what I'm looking at?", "Ooooh!", "What is that?!" "You're kidding me!". These were the sort of comments we heard last Sunday evening at our telescopes. We - Chuck and Pat McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Wayne Rothermich, Gretchen and Greg Brinser and myself - were at the cliffside overlooking the coast at the Bacara Resort. Representing the AU - the Museum's astronomy club named for the distance from the Earth to the Sun, one astronomical unit - we had been asked to bring telescopes and set them up for participants at a conference to enjoy, between dinner and the end of the conference. So we drove out to that forbidden territory, cautiously drove in and - half expecting to be told to scam out of here - we were, instead, welcomed and pointed in the direction of a huge, gigantic tent with flying flags. Most of us

had read in the newspapers that this was a very big conference of very big CEO's of corporations all over the country, as well as some stars - though not the kind we are used to looking at. The tent had been set up to serve over four hundred participants at a sit-down dinner and, as we set up our scopes right near the tent, people kept coming out to see what was going on all during the evening. Actually, the people most appreciative of our coming out there and setting up the telescopes, were the staff - waiters, organizers, musicians and such - who came out at the beginning before the guests arrived, and were impressed and very thrilled to have the opportunity to look through telescopes.

But that is not to say that the guests didn't enjoy what we showed them. They certainly did and were very much impressed when we told them that that nebula in Orion's sword was over 1600 light years away and might even not be there any longer, since it took over 1600 years for the light they were looking at to get here. And they exclaimed over seeing Jupiter and its four large moons and Saturn with its beautiful rings. Not to mention exceedingly bright Venus as it dropped down into the ocean. It was an unusually clear night at the shore, not even any marine haze that commonly spoils viewing around here. These people didn't really know how lucky they were to see three planets, a double star, a nebula and several galaxies that night. But we knew, and were grateful for the opportunity to show off our beautiful telescopes and our expertise. I won't be surprised if we're asked back again, and, since they paid the Museum for our appearance, it was a real win/win experience for all.

Messier Marathon 2001

The AU Messier Marathon started out cold and windy, and soon turned cold, windy, dusty, wet, and foggy! Ten intrepid AU observers and four guests braved the elements to bag a few objects before the sky vanished. Chris McDougall came all the way from Truckee for this?? At least it didn't snow.

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Current annual membership rates are:

Single	\$15	Family	\$25
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Our address is:

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On the Web: www.sbau.org

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