



# AU AstroNews

## The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

April 2007

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

### OUTREACH SUMMARY

The last month was a busy one for AU Outreach, with lots of school science nights. AU volunteers Andy & Bridget Allen, Warren Bitters, John Boyd, Jason & Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Ruben Gutierrez, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, Dale Lowdermilk, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, and Tim Wittenburg showed cool astronomy stuff to 1091 customers.

### OUTREACH FOR APRIL

Here are the AU events scheduled so far for April. To get the latest information on schedules, or directions, contact Chuck at 964-8201 or [macpuzl@west.net](mailto:macpuzl@west.net).

#### FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 7 PM

After a quick planetarium show by Krissie, then she will also be our distinguished speaker for the evening.

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 5 PM

AU planning meeting in the classroom next to Krissie's office. Anyone is welcome to attend and help plan your club's activities. **\*\* Please note that this is a change from our usual practice of holding the planning meeting on the night of the SBMNH Star Party. \*\***

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 8 PM

**\*\* This is an unconfirmed event, and may be cancelled. \*\*** Telescopes for LA Conservation Corps kids at the Sedgwick Reserve, at the end of Brinkerhoff Road in the Santa Ynez Valley. If you come by 6 PM, you're welcome to join them for a simple BBQ burger dinner.

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 8 PM

Monthly Public Star Party, next to Palmer Observatory at SBMNH. With the time change, we'll start later.

#### FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 8 PM

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College, just outside Carroll Observatory.

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 10 AM TO 10 PM

Astronomy Day all day at the Museum. Solar scopes, planetarium shows, and exhibits by day. At 3 PM we'll raffle off (free!) a telescope and other

astro goodies to lucky youngsters. In the evening, we'll have a telescope clinic and star party.

#### FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 4:30 PM

Star Wars themed baby shower for Krissie & Kevin in the Broder building at SBMNH (across the creek)! Taco bar, drinks, and fun games. Friends and family are welcome; please RSVP to Javier ([jrivera@sbnature2.org](mailto:jrivera@sbnature2.org)) by April 18. A bank account has been set up (in Krissie and Kevin's name) for the baby boy. You are all welcome to offer any goodies or food for the shower. For any donations to the fund, please contact Easter Moorman at 682-4711, extension 117 or [emoorman@sbnature2.org](mailto:emoorman@sbnature2.org).

#### Goleta Valley Junior High Needs Help!

GVJHS is trying to set up astronomy activities with the Las Cumbres Observatory remote telescopes in Australia. They need help setting up the school's Macintosh computer lab and network to use the requisite data manipulation software, mostly open-source packages like GIMP, FITS Liberator, DS9, and Stellarium. Volunteers would work in conjunction with the school's IT staff. If you can help the school with this interesting, cutting-edge astronomy learning program, please contact Kim Miller at 967-7263.

#### GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY TRIP!

There's still time and space for you to join this year's SBAU trek to the Griffith Observatory! Our Galaxy Class Starship (Airbus) will warp out of our Command Headquarters (SBMNH parking lot) on Star Date 05.09.2007 at 9:30AM (come early). If the Dilithium Crystals can remain stable and keep our Flag Ship at warp speed, and if we're not attacked by Romulan or Klingon birds-of-prey, we should arrive by 11:30AM. For just \$33.00, about the cost of a Vulcan hairstyle, you can purchase a boarding pass that will cover the transport and shuttle craft ride up to the observatory, and back. Seniors and kids 5 to 12 can take off \$4.00, kids 4 and under can take off \$8.00. You can only purchase a planetarium show ticket once you get there for \$7.00. Although there are no Star Fleet

type food replicators, there is a cool Café on the grounds. We're planning to disembark on the return voyage around 4 O'clock, and providing the ship's captain doesn't have to implement evasive maneuvers, we should return to Santa Barbara around 6:30PM. Wow, what a day it's going to be! So, energize those communicators and beam Ruben Gutierrez a subspace message at [rubenalvag@aol.com](mailto:rubenalvag@aol.com) or call him at (805)682-0405 and secure your boarding pass today!

### **WHAT'S UP WITH THE PLANETS?**

During the month of April Venus soars to nearly its highest evening altitude as it passes by the Pleiades and the eye of the bull, Aldebaran. Shining at magnitude – 4.1, our “evening star” hikes through Taurus and sets more than 3.5 hours after sunset. From April 11- 19, you can watch Venus glide by the Hyades and the Pleiades. This should be fun to watch! And although Venus gets no closer than  $7.5^{\circ}$  from Aldebaran, the contrast in color between this red giant and our nearest planetary neighbor should be striking! On the other side of the sky, Saturn glows at magnitude +0.4, very high in the southwest at dusk. It halts its retrograde motion on April 19 and rests for the moment only  $12^{\circ}$  west of Regulus, the heart of the Leo, the Lion. This puts Saturn in extreme western Leo, near the border of Cancer. Take advantage! This position will place the ringed giant high in the sky for steady observation. Another bonus: Saturn's rings will be inclined more than  $15^{\circ}$  from edgewise for the next few months, but they will close rapidly. Enjoy them now! They will not be nearly this open again for about seven years (one fourth of Saturn's orbital journey around the Sun). Jupiter rises at the end of the evening during April. Beaming at magnitude – 2.3, Jupiter halts its prograde motion (toward the East) and goes into retrograde motion (toward the West) on April 6. Watch this subtle motion against the background stars of Scorpius. Jupiter's change in position will be especially evident as Jupiter lies about  $11^{\circ}$  from the heart of the Scorpion, Antares, as it begins its retrograde dance. Four months from now Jove will have pulled to within  $5^{\circ}$  of the star. What a summer treat! In the morning sky Mars moves into the zodiacal constellation of Aquarius, the Water Bearer, and on the mornings of April 28 and 29 passes to within a degree south or southeast of 6<sup>th</sup>-magnitude Uranus. Mercury is poorly placed for observation during the month of April. We will have to wait until next month for a spectacular western-sky apparition!

### **A trip to the best place in Los Angeles – The Griffith Observatory**

*by Jim Williams*

Well, this is a trip you have to make - Griffith has always been the coolest place in all of Los Angeles, and its improved 500%. You start by making reservations on the web page- this gets you a time-slot ticket on the shuttle from the zoo parking lot up to the observatory- about a 20 minute ride. There are signs showing where to park, and a large LED sign too. There is an audio/video presentation on the bus on the way, which is nice. First thing you do after de-bussing is dash up to the Observatory, go up the ramp to the East Terrace, and get a ticket to the Planetarium show. (I understand there are machines to buy tickets from as well- I stood in line- cattle-like) My ticket was for 12:45pm, so I went straight to the roped off area on the West Terrace to wait (I was first in line ha-ha). The show is just fantastic- the star field is breathtaking, the new seats are luxurious, and the computer graphics are just without equal. The show is (and always has been at Griffith) by a live presenter. The view from the top deck is the known as the best in Los Angeles- the day I was there it had just rained, and you could see the horizon- I think the ocean was out there. And out front you can pose with the Hollywood sign, while standing by the new Rebel Without A Cause Memorial. Griffith has simply been transformed. If you were transported in time from 2000 to the present and dropped on the front lawn, your first impression would be that little has changed- but there's a telltale little cylindrical elevator building off to one side. What was once the main exhibit hall is now the “upstairs”, and huge amounts of exhibit space have been added under the front lawn and sidewalks. You can wander from the upstairs to downstairs by a couple of different routes; the whole site now lends itself to exploration and discovery. There's an elevator to every level- you'll have to walk a lot horizontally to get to them, but you can do the observatory stairless if you need to. Yes, there's an actual cafeteria, The Café at the End of the Universe (the name has a Santa Barbara connection- the first one to email me with the connection gets a free Griffith Observatory patch!), instead of the outdoor hot dog stand that used to be by the parking lot. The sign on the drink cooler says the food is by Wolfgang Puck. I recommend the squash soup. While sliding up the ramp with an exhibit of star jewelry along the wall, and looking at the cool marble colored rubber tile, I ran into Dr.

Krupp, the director- I was kind of stunned and didn't think to get a posed picture with him, but he asked how things were going at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History- (Wonderful I said, and we have a terrific Director and Astronomy Programs Coordinator!) Griffith Observatory was built in the 30's with first class materials; one of the reasons it was still in reasonably good shape even before the renovation- and the new work is just as good (hey, there are real marble partitions in the new restrooms, just like in the old ones!). In the gift shop (and yes, a real one finally), you can buy lots of cool stuff like a model of the Astronomers Monument (I'm a sucker for that sort of thing). Hollywood shows up here too, as George Stanley, designer of the Oscar statue, was the co-sculptor of Sir Isaac Newton on the monument. He kind of looks like he's ready to accept an award. I heard a bit of trivia/rumor on the bus ride back- a local lady told me that she had done research in old newspapers in the Los Angeles public library, and she figured that the benefactor for the observatory, Griffith J Griffith, had offered the money as a bribe to the city, to get into good standing after he'd spent time in San Quentin for the attempted murder of his wife. Well, they don't mention that at Griffith Observatory, and we can all be grateful that, for whatever reason, Griffith loved the stars and left a legacy like the Observatory. Don't miss a chance to go see it with its new additions!



*photo courtesy of Jim Williams*

**FOR SALE**

10-inch f/5 Newtonian Reflector OTA. The primary mirror was recently coated with 96% enhanced coatings. The black metal tube housing the optics is 48.5" long with a side bearing kit but no Dobsonian rocker box – similar item in the Orion catalog with shipping and handling sells for \$565. Asking price is \$333 – or any nice offer. Please leave message at 805-964-4839.

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Updated monthly 682-4711x405

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**Single = \$15                      Family = \$25**

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**April 2007**

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
1	2 ○	3	4	5	6 Monthly Meeting 7PM	7 Planning Meeting 5PM *Sedgwick Reserve 8PM
8	9	10 ◐	11	12	13	14 SBMNH Star Party 8PM
15	16	17 ●	18	19	20 Westmont 8 PM	21 Astronomy Day! SBMNH 10AM – 10PM
22	23	24 ◐	25	26	27 Baby Shower! Broder Building 4:30PM	28
29	30					

\*subject to change

**The Astronomical Unit**

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