



# AU AstroNews

## The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

January 2008

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

### AU Officers for 2008

The usual tumultuous election process at the December meeting resulted in very little change in the slate of AU officers for 2008. **Tim Wittenburg** remains our beloved President. **Chad Caprio** seized control of the office of Vice-President in a coup that left many in the audience gasping for their breath. **Ruben Gutierrez** is staying on as Treasurer, and **Timma Buck** is our new Secretary. Presidential appointments were **Art Harris** as Equipment Wrangler, **Paul Winn** as Webmaster, **Chuck McPartlin** as Outreach Coordinator, and **Tom Whittemore** as Newsletter Editor. **Tim Crawford** will be Refreshments Coordinator, with able assistance from **Timma Buck**.

Thanks to all of the officers and appointees from last year for keeping the AU running smoothly! **Brother Laurence Harms** was our Vice-President, **Bridget and Andy Allen** were our Co-Secretaries, and **Timma Buck** was Food Dudette.

### 2007 Outreach Summary

The last year was a decent one for outreach. We had **88 events** (not counting complete rainouts), and **40 AU volunteers** who helped out at events. Here's how the last five years stack up:

Year	Events	AU Volunteers	Total Customers
2003	94	44	10,770 (3,500 for Mars)
2004	87	37	5,645
2005	99	52	7,473
2006	114	50	8,316
2007	88	40	7,116

As a well-deserved reward, AU volunteers helping out at six or more outreach events in a year get their AU membership extended for a year. This year's list is: Bridget & Andy Allen, Warren Bitters, Chad Caprio, Bill Clausen, Krissie Cook, Jason & Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Carolyn & Ed Edwards, Mike Farris, John Gomm, Ruben Gutierrez, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, Chris Larson, Pat & Chuck

McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Javier Rivera, Nancy Rohrer, Tom Whittemore, and Tim Wittenburg. A big **THANK YOU** to all the AU volunteers who participated throughout the year!

### January Events

Here's what's scheduled so far for January. Let's hope the weather cooperates! Remember, events are subject to change, so for the latest updates, contact Chuck at 964-8201 or [macpuzl@west.net](mailto:macpuzl@west.net).

#### Thursday, January 3, around 11 PM

The Quadrantid meteor shower may be good this year.

#### Friday, January 4, 7 PM

Catch a quick planetarium show by Krissie Cook, followed by our first monthly meeting of the year - AU member John Martinez will tell us about the Las Cumbres Observatory Global Telescope, and the 33-inch telescope they are installing at the Sedgwick Reserve, near Los Olivos.

#### Saturday, January 12, 5 PM

Monthly AU planning meeting in the classroom outside Krissie's office. Come help your club plan our activities for the coming year.

#### Saturday, January 12, 7 PM

Monthly SBMNH Star Party. Bring a scope, or just come out and mooch some views of the winter sky. Comet Holmes may be fading, but Comet Tuttle should make up for it. Some folks from the Vandenberg Astronomical Society may be joining us, too.

#### Wednesday, January 16, setup 6:30 PM

Slide show and telescopes for Franklin Elementary School. Kids from Cleveland Elementary School will be coming by to avenge their cloud-out last November.

### **Friday, January 18, setup 7 PM**

Monthly Westmont Public Telescope Night. The big 24-inch scope should be open for viewing.

### **Thursday, January 24, setup 7 PM**

Slide show and telescopes for Goleta Valley Junior High School.

### **Thursday, January 31, 6:30 - 9 PM**

Telescopes for Foothill Elementary School. Pat and Chuck will probably not be able to make this event, so we'll need some extra help!

### **When You Wish Upon a Star...**

People will tell you Christmas is a time of miracles—a time where hope and peace is reborn each year, reminding us of the good in all of us. Somewhere I read or heard that while we may believe in miracles, we must not expect them. As for hope and peace, I don't think we should give up on them just yet. Sometimes events happen though that may dissuade us of their purpose.

I was traveling to the Museum for the monthly meeting this past December. On the way I encountered heavier than normal traffic. In our area of town new sewer lines were being installed and half the streets were in disarray. Trying to cross town on the usual streets proved impossible and there was the annual Christmas parade preparing to start, and the streets were closed down for several blocks. I had to circumvent all this. As I encountered more lefts and rights, I became more impatient and annoyed at anything or anyone slowing my progress. I hit just about every red light, and decided it was a plot—there must be someone downtown at a little desk with a set of buttons he could press to create a red light wherever and on whomever he wanted. A driver of one car was talking on a cell phone and wasn't moving with the flow of traffic. That kept me from making my light and I brashly spoke under my breath, "Moron, get off the phone!" I was waiting at another intersection for a driver to cross traveling the other direction so I could turn left. At the last moment he turned right without making a signal. I scowled and said, "Come on. Oh, nice signal!" I finally turned left when I realized I didn't have my signal on! With a little embarrassment I laughed and said to myself, "Now where is my spirit of Christmas?" So I cooled down and drove to my destination with a little more humility. As I approached the Museum,

my imagination started to wander. I imagined the Christmas Star and thought what it might look like if it marked the position of the Museum underneath it - just about over there. Maybe my mind went there because it was December and I had just read an article regarding the Star of Bethlehem: the Christmas Star. I wondered what it might have looked like back then. Apparently there are only two places in the New Testament the Star in the East is mentioned. That's all that is given to astronomers to work with. Now, we have software programs to replicate what the sky looked like, but it's still hard to say what the Star in the East really was.

When the sun leaves our daytime behind and the night comes on softly, the avenue of the night is where we can go to look up and stretch our eyes. It gives us a chance to clear the air from all the noise and haste. The hissing sounds in our ears from the day's toil can drift up and out into the darkness and be replaced by the peace of the night. Once, at a star party, a young boy came up to me and asked, "Is it true that if you wish upon a star, that the wish will come true?" I didn't know how to respond at first, and then smiled at him and said, "You bet! Of course it's true." I thought if it weren't true, what would it hurt? If his wish did come true, he was better for it. I wish we all could look up at the stars and send a wish out into the darkness or a prayer that would fall upon those who need it most.

I'm not sure exactly when Christmas comes, but it does. Oh, I don't mean the day, but the real spirit of it. It's something I just sense. For me, it doesn't start with the banging on a drum in a marching parade or with a thunderclap in the sky at night. Instead it comes from within, quite suddenly and unannounced, and whispers gently "I have come, again." A certain joy comes over me, and once again I travel through the looking glass to a world which appears different. The air smells a little cleaner; the colors of the day are a little truer, and the words of those around me seem to carry more weight. It seems like there is a purpose and meaning to it all, but I can't seem to put a finger on it, and that's just fine. If you wish hard for something and it doesn't come true, maybe it's not time yet. Maybe you have to just keep on wishing. Maybe things happen when they're least expected too. Take me, for instance. I made my meeting. It was a great time. On the way home in the car, I went the usual way, never swore at anyone, never

got annoyed, and I never hit one red light! It wasn't until I got home I realized it. So, maybe some miracles are small and insignificant, but they are miracles, nonetheless. I guess it comes down to just believing. Believing instills us with strength, and hope sustains us all. Who knows? Maybe there's not just one Christmas Star. Maybe all the stars in the December skies are Christmas stars! Maybe all those stars are wishes waiting for someone to wish on. And, I'll bet there are enough stars up there for all of us. Maybe more! So, the next time you are out under the canopy of night and look up during the month of December, think just for a tiny moment of all the stars as Christmas Stars, giving us all the gift of peace and tranquility. Look up. Go ahead: wish upon a star. And while you are standing there, listen - way down deep inside - you just might hear a small voice whispering, "I am here at last...Christmas."

As always, I wish that all your dreams find you, and that all your wishes come true.

*Tim Crawford  
Christmas 2007*



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### SBMNH Astronomy Program Tape

Updated monthly 682-4711x405

AU **AstroNews**, the monthly publication of the **Astronomical Unit (AU)**, is mailed to the AU membership. For publishing consideration for the next month, submit astronomical items by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the current month!

### AU annual membership rates:

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

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**On the Web:** <http://www.sbau.org>

## January 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3 Quadrantid Meteor Shower!	4 AU Meeting 7PM	5
6	7	8 ●	9	10	11	12 Planning Meeting 5PM SBMNH Star Party 7PM
13	14	15 ◐	16 Franklin Elementary 6:30PM	17	18 Westmont College 7PM	19
20	21	22 ○	23	24 Goleta Valley JH 7PM	25	26
27	28	29	30 ◑	31 Foothill Elementary 6:30 – 9PM Help Needed!		

### The Astronomical Unit

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