

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT RIVER
ASTRONOMY CLUB
An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

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May, 2009

Officers: President, **Bill Warren:** (770)229-6108, warren7804@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Higgins;** Secretary-Treasurer, **Steve Bentley.**

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Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org.

Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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Club Calendar. Thurs., May 14: FRAC meeting (7:30 p.m., 2nd floor of the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus); **Fri.-Sat., May 15-16:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri.-Sat., May 22-23:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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President's Message.

Dear Steve (Bentley):

On behalf of everyone in FRAC, and everyone else who attended **Georgia Sky View 2009** as well, I want to thank you for all the time, hard work and attention to detail you put into this year's GSV. Words cannot

adequately express the depth of my admiration for what you accomplished this year – but I'll try:

Under unimaginably difficult circumstances – taking over as GSV coordinator just 4 months before the event, and facing a collapsing national economy that has everyone worried about their financial situation -- you took over an event that was virtually assured of failure and turned it into one of FRAC's greatest success stories.

With members and non-members alike fearful for their financial futures -- and with last year's nightmare rain (that moved in and stayed throughout the weekend) still fresh in those attendees' minds -- I expected maybe 20-25 registrants this year. Instead, we ended up with an astonishing **61** registrants – *the second-largest total in GSV's 6-year history!*

And that wasn't luck, either. Those registrants didn't stumble into Camp McIntosh by accident and decide to stay because it looked like a nice campground. You and **Tom Moore** got the word out that *Hey, folks, we're putting on a grand show at GSV this year, and you need to be there!*, and people responded to it. In fact, the **26** present or former FRAC members who registered for GSV '09 was the highest total in the event's history. Among other things, that shows how solidly the club was behind you this year.

And boy!, did you deliver on your promises! With the weather cooperating nicely – after Thurs. night, anyway – the event ran with the precision of a finely-tuned Rolex watch.

Your speakers were outstanding, and they were as determined as everyone else to make the event a success: **Norm Worsley** contributed a much-needed piece of equipment and help with other computer problems, and **Phil Sacco** gave **four** talks, including two fireside constellation presentations. Talk about going the extra mile – those fine gentlemen did that and more!

Steve, your handling of the door prizes was nothing short of miraculous! With every day's news proclaiming our tottering national and state economies to be disasters in progress, I expected merchants to shy away from sending prizes for this year's event, but that wasn't the case at all: this year's total was

comparable in both quantity and quality to previous GSVs and other star parties as well. And *that* wasn't luck, either.

(For those who don't know, last December Steve went through *Sky & Telescope* and *Astronomy* issues, made a list of all their advertisers and sent each of them a snail-mail request for door prizes. Then he turned around and sent them a *second* request for door prizes in January, thereby allowing them to consider their donations in light of either their 2008 or 2009 inventories. It was a brilliant strategy, and Steve made it look easy. But it *wasn't* easy, not by a long shot. As we learned in watching how thoroughly Steve prepared for this year's GSV, he was planning for success in desperate times.)

You had lots of help in preparing for GSV 2009, Steve, and you took full advantage of it. That explains in part why this year's GSV was such an unqualified success. But FRAC's officers, board members and your many other friends and admirers in and out of FRAC are well aware that this year's event began and ended with *your* vision of what GSV '09 should be, and *your* dedication and hard work toward making that vision a reality. Many members helped, but your vision and example was the beacon that guided GSV toward success.

Ya done good, son, real good. On behalf of three-score happy campers who went away glad that they came to GSV '09 and looking forward to more of the same next year, I want to thank you again for providing us with a thoroughly delightful weekend filled with fun, friends and happy memories.

As I mentioned earlier, Steve B. didn't work in a vacuum, doing it all by himself. He had lots of help along the way, most of which I won't cite here lest I inadvertently leave someone off the list. But at least four members merit special attention:

***Doug Maxwell** gave the ice machine its annual cleaning and made sure the heating and refrigeration units were in good working order everywhere in camp. Doug oughta send ISSP a bill for his services, since he saves them a bundle by doing that every spring;

***Dwight Harness** oversaw the setup and running of the TV, satellite connections and other computer hookups;

***Betty Bentley** (slogan: *If everybody doesn't gain ten pounds this weekend, I'm not doing my job*) lovingly prepared two cakes, brownies, Midnight Munchies (sausage biscuits -- *real* biscuits, not the frozen fakes) and breakfasts on Fri. & Sat. mornings; and

***Dan Pillatzki** (slogan: *You don't want to know what I'm up to my elbows in*) helped with various plumbing problems. When he wasn't doing that, Dan was finding ways to irritate me, which he sees as his calling in life. (See also pp. 3 and 6.)

Of those four esteemed ladies and gentlemen, Dwight, at least, was paid for his services (in a manner of speaking): he won the biggest door prize, an 8x-24x zoom eyepiece from Vixen Optics.

To everyone else who helped out in planning, setup, takedown and everything else in between: Thanks for helping to make GSV 2009 the smashing success it was. As in astronomy, the brightest stars get most of the attention, but we wouldn't have a universe without the other ones, too.

Finally, please join me in welcoming **George & Tina Warren** and **Tim & Celia Astin** to FRAC.

George, who lives with Tina in Pacific Grove, CA, is my older and wiser brother. He's a retired author who had 49 novels published, including the highly successful, 15-volume *Children of the Lion* historical series. Living 3,000 miles away, George and Tina are about as likely to attend our meetings and observings as a politician is to turn down a handshake opportunity, but we're proud to have them in FRAC.

Tim & Celia are back in FRAC, having joined the club at our second-ever meeting in March, 1997. You'll soon find, as we did back then, that Tim & Celia are two of the most delightful people on the planet. (Tim also has earned four A. L. observing pins, i.e., Binocular Messier, Lunar, Messier and

Universe Sampler.) Take it from me, folks, you're gonna like Tim & Celia. A lot.

(Of course, you'd like George & Tina, too, but monthly 3,000-mi. commutes can be somewhat of a drain on anyone's finances who doesn't happen to be a movie star or pro athlete.)

-Bill Warren

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I am one individual on a small planet in a little star system in one of the galaxies.

-Robert Assagioli

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Okay, so how close did we come to achieving our "100 Hours of Astronomy" goal on the nights of Apr. 2nd-5th?

Well, two of the nights were clouded out. So that means we did terrible, right?

Wrong. In fact, we came very close to achieving our goal in just two nights.

On Fri. night in **Steve Bentley's** front yard, 11 people – **Steve, Betty**, their daughter **Terri Mills** and granddaughters **Brianna & Erin; Dwight & Laura Harness** and their guest, **Kirsten Gunter; Tom Moore; Larry Higgins;** and yr. editor – spent 3-1/2 hrs. under clear skies. Terri's husband **Wayne** was there for an hour, and we had 15 visitors. We'll assume that each visitor stayed an average of 30 minutes. So let's do the math and see where it leads.

11 people x 3.5 hrs. = 38.5 hrs. + 1 hr. (for Wayne) and 7.5 hrs. for our visitors. That adds up to **47 contact hours for Fri. night.**

The following evening in the brightly lighted downtown Griffin KFC parking lot, ten people – **Jerry & Bev Williams; Dwight & Laura Harness** and **Kirsten Gunter; Tom Moore; Larry Higgins; Kevin Murdock** and his guest, **Cathy Willis;** and yr. editor – spent 4 hrs. with an estimated 60 visitors, passersby and **Saturn** and the **Moon** (the only two objects that the sky conditions and light pollution

would permit us to see.) This time we'll assume that each passerby stayed 10 minutes.

So. Ten people x 4 hrs. = 40 hrs. + 600 min. divided by 60 visitors = 10 hrs., for a total of **50 contact hours for Sat. night.**

Altogether, then, we had **97 contact hours** on the two nights when the skies cooperated.

On behalf of Steve, Larry and everyone else in FRAC, thanks, guys and gals, for helping out in such a big, big way!

Our April meeting was a truly magical affair. We had a total of 20 attendees, including: four lovely ladies – **Irene Cole, Brit Danei, Olga Flores** and **Betty Bentley** – and two pretty preteens, **Brianna Mills** (the Bentleys' granddaughter) and her friend **Tori Taylor;** two old friends we hadn't seen in a year of Sundays (new member **Tim Astin** and old member **Dan Newcombe**); the ever clever **Dan Pillatzki**, who stole yr. editor's pen and signed the roll as "John Hancock"; **Jessie Dasher**, a welcome sight after having missed a few meetings recently; and our Rugged Roster of Regular Rowdies – **Curt Cole, Tom Danei, Charles Turner, Carlos Flores, Dwight Harness, Larry Higgins, Joel Simmons, Felix Luciano, Steve Bentley** – who gave a highly encouraging report on the progress of **Ga. Sky View 2009** – and last but certainly not least, **yrs. truly.**

On Apr. 11th, six merrie madcaps – **Betty & Steve Bentley, Beverly & Jerry Williams, Larry Higgins & yr. editor** – ran a FRAC booth at the Bluebirds & Bluegrass Arts & Crafts Festival at Dauset Trail for 7 hrs. One visitor signed up for GSV, and 3 others appeared very interested in joining FRAC. In all, slightly more than 3,000 people attended the event, and about 175 of them stopped by our booth to look at the **Sun** through filters or talk about astronomy. It was a very good day's work.

We had nine members – **Larry Higgins, Mike Stuart, Dwight Harness, Alan Bolton, Charles Turner, Jessie Dasher, Alan & Vicky Pryor** and yr. editor – at our April 17th Cox Field observing. The sky was no better than average, but we saw a lot of detail in a lot of deep-sky objects, especially when Alan P. would find things in his 20" Obsession and we'd barge in en masse and nudge him out of the way so we could look. (Not really, but only because Alan

was so nice about it.) Larry suggested that next time we should leave our telescopes at home and just tell Alan what we want to see.

A record 26 present or former FRAC members registered for GSV '09: **Steve & Betty Bentley; Alan & Sally Bolton; Tom Danei; Charles Turner; Dan Newcombe; Steve Knight; Carlos & Olga Flores; Dwight & Laura Harness; Larry Higgins; Felix Luciano; Doug Maxwell; Kevin Murdock; Dan Pillatzki; Alan & Vicki Pryor; Phil Sacco; Dr. Richard Schmude; Joel Simmons; Smitty; Bill Warren;** and **Jerry & Bev Williams.** In all, 61 people attended this year's event, and a great time was had by all.

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This 'n That. Got a telescope, eyepiece or other astronomical item that you want to buy, sell or swap? We'll put it in the *Observer* on a one-time basis – and we'll also put it on our website's new "Buy, Swap or Sell" link where it'll stay for 60 days unless you ask to have it removed or extended for an additional 60 days. Our new web link is the brainchild of **Tom Moore**, who is constantly searching for ways to make our website as user-friendly as possible.

Here's how it works: If you have something you want to put on that site, write it up, describing the item in detail (manufacturer, size, condition, your asking price and anything else you think we need to know about it.) Be sure to list all accessories included in the deal. Photos are optional. Add the necessary contact information and send your writeup to: **Bill Warren, 1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, GA 30224,** or warren7804@bellsouth.net.

Only FRAC members will be permitted to advertise items to buy, swap or sell at either location.

***A Quickie from Prof. Stargazer:** "If *photons* are the basic components of light, shouldn't the basic components of dark matter be *no-tons*?"

*Congratulations to **Amanda Pillatzki, Dan's** talented daughter, who recently accepted a full scholarship in music to Clayton State University.

When we asked Dan when Amanda would matriculate, he replied, "What kind of girl do you think she is? Not until after she's married, of course!"

*Congratulations, too, to **Laura Harness** for qualifying for an Outreach Club certificate and pin. That brings our Outreach Award recipient total to 16.

To earn such a pin, you need only to participate in five FRAC public observing or other outreach activities. Here's how many outreach activities or hours *you* have at writing:

Alan Bolton, 2 events toward his Outreach pin; **Betty Bentley**, 38.5 hrs. toward her Stellar Outreach certificate; **Beverly Williams**, 2 events; **Bill Warren**, 26.5 hrs. toward his Master Outreach certificate (he has already qualified for a Stellar Outreach certificate); **Brit Danei**, 2 events; **Charles Boils**, 1 event; **Curt Cole**, 23.75 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate; **David O'Keeffe**, 2 events; **Doug Maxwell**, 2 events; **Dwight Harness**, 7.5 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate; **Irene Cole**, 3 events; **Jerry Williams**, 2 events; **Joe Auriemma**, 2 events; **Joel Simmons**, 6 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate; **John Wallace**, 3 events; **Ken Walburn**, 1 event; **Kevin Murdock**, 2 events; **Larry Higgins**, 18.5 hrs. toward his Master Outreach certificate (he has already qualified for his Stellar Outreach certificate); **Mike Stuart**, 2 events; **Sally Bolton**, 2 events; **Sara O'Keeffe**, 2 events; **Shiphrah Boils**, 1 event; **Steve Bentley**, 48.5 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate; **Tom Danei**, 2 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate; and **Tom Moore**, 27 hrs. toward his Stellar Outreach certificate.

***Tom Danei** has just bought a new Starmaster FX f/4 20-in. truss tube 'scope with GoTo. He'll be able to do astrophotography with it. It'll be here in 4-5 months.

Who'd ever of think there'd come a time when four of our members -- **Tom, Steve Bentley, Charles Turner & Alan Pryor** -- would have 'scopes that are 18" or larger? (**Smitty** has a 16" 'scope.)

***FOR SALE, Part I.** Having reached age 73 and unable to use such large 'scopes anymore, long-time

member **Joe Morris** has two big, beautiful ‘scopes for sale at *great* asking prices.

1. A 15-in. Obsession Dob with Nova f/4.5 mirror. Manuals and mirror test results included. Also included: two Orion 2” eyepieces; a telrad; laser collimator w/2” barrel; diagonal heater wired; nylon shroud and broadcloth cover for assembled telescope; JMI NGC-MAX computerized pointing with high-resolution encoders installed, manual and printed Celestial Data Base; Orion E.P. collimator; and TeleVue Paracorr (that corrects for comas around the edges of the field of view).

The telescope and equipment are in pristine condition, not a scratch. The ‘scope and accessories listed above cost Joe \$5,285, but he’s willing to sell it all for half-price at \$2,650.

Joe also has a Toshiba laptop with SkyChart III for telescope control via the NGC-MAX that he’s willing to sell separately at a very reasonable price.

2. A 10-in. Meade LX200 GPS ‘scope, also in pristine condition, not a scratch. The telescope comes with Smart Mount Upgrade, UHTC Coatings, 2” UHTC Enhanced Diagonal and all necessary operating manuals. Accessories include: a 1-1/4” Meade Series 3000 25mm eyepiece, Peterson Engineering Eye Opener, EZ Focus kit (not installed), Mounting Assistant, Buck’s Gears (not installed) and EZ Clutch kit; Orion dew zapper; Jim’s Mobile customized hard case; ScopeStuff Stainless Screw Set#RSR3 (not installed); Sky Hook; and various auxiliary cables, etc.

The ‘scope and accessories listed above cost Joe \$4,146, but his asking price is just \$3,000.

Joe is willing to meet with any interested buyer, whether at his home or elsewhere, to try out either telescope. He can be reached at (678)481-9433, or at n4eu@yahoo.com.

***For Sale, Part II. Tom Danei** is selling a dandy Williams Optics Anniversary Edition Zenithstar Flourite Doublet (25 FD) 80mm APO telescope with FPL-53 element. This f/6.9 Zenithstar ‘scope is well suited for viewing the Moon, planets, nebulae,

clusters, large galaxies and comets, and is suitable for wide-field astrophotography with the right accessories.

Accessories include: a 2” or 1-1/4” Plossl eyepiece, a red dot finderscope, a 2” Dielectric diagonal mirror with 1-1/4” adapter, a Celestron Nexstar GoTo mount, and a sturdy Williams Optics wooden tripod.

The Nexstar computerized altazimuth mount comes with a battery and database of 4,000+ objects. Its Skyalign feature allows for quick and easy alignment. Flash upgradable hand control, software and motor control units are downloadable for internet product updates. The mount has been upgraded, all plastic parts having been replaced with aircraft-grade aluminum custom components. The wooden tripod is very stable, an upgrade from the Celestron tripod that came with the mount.

Including upgrades, Tom has invested more than \$1,500 in his Zenithstar Anniversary Edition ‘scope, but his asking price is only \$995. If you’re interested, you can contact Tom at danei@bellsouth.net.

*Finally, there’s this, another non-astronomy joke: Guy goes into a store to buy a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. He tells the store owner, “I’m looking for a pair sporn-rimmed hectacles – I mean, heck-rimmed spornacles – uh, that is, I mean, uh...”

The clerk says, “That’s all right, sir, I know what you mean.” He turns to a nearby clerk. “Jones, go get this gentleman a pair of spork-rimmed hectalrims.”

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For everyone, I think, must see that astronomy compels the soul to look upward, and leads us from this world to another.

-Plato

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. After a truly hectic April, things are calming down somewhat in May.

Our club meeting will be at **7:30 p.m. on Thurs., May 14th**, in the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin

campus. Our program will feature **Steve Bentley** reporting on **GSV '09**. You'll be *very* interested in hearing the results of this year's star party.

Our Cox Field observings will be held at dark on **Fri.-Sat., May 15th-16th** and **Fri.-Sat., May 22nd-23rd**. Since we had hot dogs and hamburgers left over from GSV, we'll cook them on Sat. evening. Ask Steve & Betty what you can bring. You can reach them at: wd4ity@bellsouth.net.

We may add a UGa-Griffin public observing at The Garden, UGa-Griffin's research and demonstration facility near U. S. Hwy. 19/41, in either May or June; if so, we'll let you know in plenty of time for you to plan accordingly.

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People You Should Know: Dan Pillatzki. Dan is one of several former members who have come back to FRAC after a leave of absence. In Dan's case, the culprit has been cancer (prostate, kidney and possibly colon). He attended GSV '09, and comes to FRAC meetings as often as his situation permits.

Quiet and soft-spoken, Dan is blessed (or cursed, depending on your point of view) with an off-beat, irreverent way of looking at things. It's not at all uncommon, when talking to Dan, for **yr. editor** to wonder, *Did he really say what I thought he said?* Sometimes hearing loss has its virtues.

He's also a practical joker. At last year's Christmas party at Ryan's, Dan spent much of the evening trying to hide forks, spoons, sugar containers, etc., in yr. editor's briefcase, intending to tell the waitresses to check the briefcase before we left. (And ask him, if you dare, to tell you how he planned to disrupt **Phil Sacco's** Sat. evening fireside constellation talk at GSV this year. It was a bit of inspired lunacy, and we were disappointed that he didn't get to try it out.)

Dan has three A. L. observing pins: Messier, Lunar and Binocular Messier. He reports that his 8-in. Orion refractor has worked very nicely since **Larry Higgins** and **Steve Bentley** fixed it at GSV so the primary mirror wouldn't keep falling out.

Dan describes his occupation as a plumber. (Actually, the term he uses is "[human excrement]

pusher," which explains why you won't find him in the Yellow Pages.) His wife **Kathy** is coordinator of the Henry Co. public library system, and he has two teenage daughters, **Amanda** and **Megan**.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, Dan's last name is pronounced "Pih LAHT skee," although yr. editor pronounces it "Pih LATT skee." (As Dan is fond of saying, "What are friends for, if not to irritate them?")

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To consider the Earth as the only populated world in infinite space is as absurd as to assert that in an entire planted field only one grain will grow.

-Metrodorus of Chios (4th cent. b.c.)

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The Sky in May. Mercury (mag. 1.1 and fading) will be low in the SW sky 30 min. after sunset on May 1st, 2^o to the right of **M45, the Pleiades**.

Saturn (mag. 0.8), slowly opening again and showing some gap in the rings near the planet, will be up all night in May.

Jupiter, Neptune, Uranus, Venus and **Mars** will be "morning stars" in May. On the 27th, Jupiter and Neptune will be just 0.4^o apart in *Capricornus*, so if you haven't seen Neptune before just find bright Jupiter in the E sky and look for Neptune's little blue or bluish-gray disk. They should be in, or nearly so, your low-power telescopic field of view.

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If *Gemini* were a spring constellation, I'd recommend that the names of The Twins be changed to **Castor** and **Pollen**.

-Prof. Stargazer

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