

## **How to Request an Observing for Your Group or Event**

The Flint River Astronomy Club (FRAC) offers free public observings for any requesting group or agency at a site of that group's choosing. We enjoy showing the universe as seen through binoculars and telescopes to everyone, especially young people.

Normally, we have between 3-10 telescopes set up and operated by FRAC members at our public observings, with visitors in line at each telescope and rotating from one line to another. In addition to the Moon and whatever planets are up, we'll show as broad a variety of celestial objects (e.g., double stars, galaxies, nebulas and star clusters) as time, sky conditions and light pollution permit. A background in astronomy is unnecessary in order for visitors to enjoy our presentations. Our members will provide commentary and answer questions regarding what the viewers are seeing. All that your guests need to bring with them is curiosity regarding what the night sky holds.

We offer the following guidelines for making the experience enjoyable for everyone.

### **1. Scheduling**

(Regarding the following, please remember that these are guidelines indicating our preferences, not rules carved in stone. We will work with you in finding mutually satisfactory observing dates.)

**1a. Preferred Dates.** In scheduling an observing, we recommend selecting two dates, a primary date and an alternate date (in case the primary date doesn't work out, weather-wise). If both dates prove unproductive, simply contact us again to reschedule the observing. The farther in advance you schedule an observing, the more likely you will be to get the dates you want – and the more time our members will have to fit those observings into our schedules.

**1b. Unsuitable Scheduling Dates.** The only dates we absolutely rule out are not seasonal but those that fall just before, on or just after July 4<sup>th</sup>, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Most of our public observings are held between the hours of sundown-11:00 p.m. The only weekends that we rule out for public observings are our monthly club observing dates. (Our club observings are held on the weekend(s) nearest to the New Moon.) The Full Moon and the 3-4 days on either side of it

function as a natural and powerful source of light pollution that bleaches out most of the night sky except the planets, but we don't mind if you don't. Of course, we have no control over which planets are up at any given time. At any rate, it is always helpful for us to know in advance approximately how many guests will be attending the observing so we can plan accordingly.

**2. Cancellation / Postponement.** Cancellation and postponement will be discussed by phone between the event organizers and the FRAC Public Observing Coordinators. Weather cancellations can be made ahead of time, but no later than 3pm the day of the event. The event organizer will be responsible for communicating to guests, and the FRAC POC will be responsible for notifying club members.

**3. An Alternative to Cancellation.** We tell our members, "Look at the sky before you leave home. If it looks bad where you are, it probably looks bad at the observing site, too. Don't go." So if it's cloudy when we're ready to leave, we won't go. The same policy should be in force at your end, too. Just tell the expected guests, children and adults alike, "If it's cloudy when you're getting ready to go, stay home."

**4. Contact Information.** We need the following information from you prior to the observing: your name, e-mail address, and telephone number of the primary contact for the day of the event. We will also need to know the address of the location where the event will be held.

### **The Observing Site**

The observing site should be on level, stable ground that is free of obstructions, traffic and bright lights, if possible, and it should be accessible by vehicles since our telescopes are too large and heavy to be carried very far. We prefer to set up in a grassy area rather than on pavement or dirt, since pavement retains daytime heat and creates shimmering telescope images, and dirt raises dust that coats our mirrors and eyepieces. And since what our telescopes essentially show is the faint light of stars and other distant celestial objects, the presence of nearby bright lights such as streetlights or security lights reduces the visibility of all but the brightest celestial objects. Bright lights – even white-beam flashlights – also reduce night vision, making it more difficult to see objects. (We use red-beam flashlights that do not hinder night vision, and we urge you to tell attendees not

to bring flashlights that emit white beams.) If your site suffers heavy light pollution that cannot be avoided – well, we’ve conducted many such observings in the past and we’ll continue to do so in the future. Like you, we will do the best we can under the prevailing conditions. (Incidentally, the best way to select a suitable observing site is to visit the area one evening prior to the observing date and see for yourself what the conditions are like and where the darkest usable areas are.)

### **Children and Pets**

Children must be supervised at all times. No horseplay or running around is permitted where the telescopes are set up, and the children should not touch the telescopes or equipment unless they are told to do so. Touching the tube even slightly will move objects out of the field of view – but more important, our telescopes are very expensive and can be easily damaged. Many of our members have invested thousands of dollars in buying the best telescopes and eyepieces on the market. We recommend discussing with children beforehand the importance of the occasion and the necessity of their behaving properly. We encourage them – and the adults present as well – to interact with us and ask questions, because that is, after all, how learning occurs.

Please, no pets (even on leashes) in the observing area.

### **Binoculars and Telescopes**

We encourage attendees to bring their own binoculars and telescopes to our observings. However, because the reason for the event is to present the night sky to our guests, club members will not work on guests’ equipment during the event. We prefer to deal with such problems on our own turf and in our own time, i.e., by inviting them to attend (and bring their telescopes to) a club observing session where, during the late afternoon hours, we can work on their telescopes while there’s daylight left.

### **Rights, Responsibilities and Liability**

FRAC and its individual members cannot and should not be held liable for personal injury or property damage resulting from anything but flagrant abuse of basic safety precautions by FRAC members. Like a band performing at a school function, we operate under the direct supervision of the event organizer(s), and it is the responsibility of whomever is in charge to provide a safe, harmonious

environment for everyone present, including us, our telescopes and our equipment.

**Contacting FRAC**

If you want to schedule an observing for your group, class, library, etc., please contact **David and Rosanne Stone** at [fracprograms@outlook.com](mailto:fracprograms@outlook.com)