

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY
CLUB, an Astronomical League affiliate

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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 Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org; discussion group at FRAC@yahoogroups.com.

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

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Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., June 4-5: Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri., June 11:** Cox Field observing (at dark); **Sat., June 12:** “Swimmin’, Eatin’ Meetin’” at **Bill Warren’s** house in Griffin; **Thurs., June 24:** UGa-Griffin lunar observing (at sundown).

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President’s Message. Like **Burt Reynolds** and **Jerry Reid** in “Smokey and the Bandit,” we’ve got a long way to go and a short time to get there in this newsletter, so here goes:

First, a great big “THANKS!” is in order for the FRACsters who supported **Georgia Sky View 2010** and helped to make it our best star party ever: **Cynthia Armstrong, Steve & Betty Bentley; Alan & Sally Bolton; Tom Danei; Carlos Flores; Dwight & Laura Harness; Larry Higgins; Felix Luciano; Doug Maxwell; Alan Pryor; Stephen Ramsden & Natalie Anderson; Phil Sacco; Dr. Richard Schmude; Joel Simmons; Steven “Smitty” Smith; and Charles Turner.** You’re a blessing to our club and **GSV!** (For more about **GSV ’10**, see pp. 3-6.)

A few months ago, we discussed the possibility of conducting monthly public lunar observings on the campus of UGa-Griffin; well, the necessary permissions have finally been granted, and we’ll start at sundown on **Thurs., June 24th.** **Larry Higgins** and **Dwight Harness** prepared the schedule, using two broad guidelines. They selected Thursdays because it’s easy to remember (our club meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of every month); and they chose the Thursdays nearest to the Full or First Quarter Moon because our Cox Field observings are scheduled around the New or Third Quarter Moon.

Finally, I know you’ll want to help me welcome FRAC’s newest members, **Tim & Diane Cunard** of Ellenwood, Ga. Although new to astronomy, Tim is enthusiastic with a capital E, and if his learning curve continues at its present pace he’ll be a seasoned veteran in no time flat. Hey, Tim & Diane, let us know what we can do to help make your FRAC membership everything you hoped it would be.

-Bill Warren

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Last Month’s Meeting/Activities. When two members – **Larry Higgins** and **yr. editor** – showed up for our Cox Field observing on May 7th, they were greeted by perfect observing conditions (pristine skies, no haze, short-sleeves cool weather and even a gentle breeze to keep the skeeters off).

Shortly after sundown, a third party arrived: **Keith Cox.**

Keith, a charter member of FRAC who attended our first club meeting back in Feb., 1997, is the son of **Loyd & Beulah Cox**, the kind folks who let us use their land for observing. It was Keith who arranged with his dad for us to use the field. Keith was a club member for several years, and we asked him recently to consider rejoining FRAC. He was looking forward to seeing old friends in his surprise visit to Cox Field. He did see two of them, though, and we hope he was as glad to see us as we were to see him.

The following evening, six visitors outnumbered the four FRAC members at The Cox. **Dylan Higgins** (**Larry's** son and a teacher/principal at The Campus, the private high school in Peachtree City where Larry taught an astronomy course last fall) brought a student along. **John Belfini**, who had missed the class observing that we conducted last October, was eager to see what he had missed. He quickly learned how to find **Saturn, Mizar/Alcor, Gamma Leo** and other bright spring objects.

Alan Pryor was there, too, along with wife **Vicky** and his new 5" Takahashi refractor. Alan's wrist is healing nicely, and his astrophotography skills are improving steadily although **Omega Centauri**, low on the southern horizon, refused to cooperate.

Rounding out the group were Larry, **yr. editor** and April Cox Field attendees **Tim & Diane Cunard** and two of their friends, **Blayr Cox** (no relation to Keith) and **Russ Labny**. Tim was eager to try out his new 4.5" Celestron Maksutov, and he was delighted to find that the GoTo system worked without a hitch.

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This 'n That. If you attended GSV 2010, you already know that we recently purchased a FRAC banner. It's a 2' x 4' white vinyl rectangle with "FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB" in black capital letters, with "www.flintriverastronomy.org" below it in lower case letters. It's just what we've needed for events such as **Ga. Sky View**, public presentations, arts & crafts festival booths, Relay For Life walkathons, etc.

Until now, we've made do with a little computer-generated, laminated sign that was rather cute but lost much of its appeal because we had to duct tape it to a table. It looked like something that a

5th-grade teacher might prepare to welcome her class on the first day of school.

Our new banner is simple yet attractive, and *very* professional in appearance. Reinforced circles in each corner permit it to be hung in a variety of ways, none of which involve duct tape. And best of all, it cost just \$40.00. When you see it, we think you'll agree that it was money well spent.

***Dwight Harness** recently suffered a bout of recurring back trouble, but it pretty much cleared up during **GSV '10**. **Betty Bentley** recently underwent an angioplasty, but you'd never know it judging by her hard work as chef extraordinaire at our star party. Betty's culinary efforts were one of the most remarked-upon aspects of the entire weekend, and she left an indelible impression on **GSV '10**. **Charles Turner** came by a couple of times during the weekend but couldn't stay due to his mother's ill health. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

***Orrs Elementary Wins "National School of Character" Honors.** On May 14th, principal **Dexter Martin** announced that Orrs won First Place honors nationally in the "2010 National Schools of Character" competition among hundreds of thousands of schools across the U. S. (FRAC is a Partner in Education with Orrs.) **Yr. editor** wrote their 7-pp., single-spaced application letter, so in a very real sense FRAC shares in the glow of Orrs's lofty Character Education achievement.

***Remarking on Felix Luciano's** astro-imaging skills, **Larry Higgins** says that he's going to start calling him "Hubble Felix." To see examples of Felix's and other FRACsters' handiwork, go to the Photos section of our FRAC@yahoogroups.com site. Felix's photos are in the M27 album.

***From Stephen Ramsden:** "Guys, Due to the withdrawal of the FAA's participation in a government-wide outreach program I can no longer do any solar or deep-sky events during my normal shifts...For the past 3 years I had been doing about 1/3 of my events on government time after securing vacation leave on those days. After approval of the

content, the FAA would change my vacation time with excused absence in order to facilitate more participation in this program...

"I have just been told that I can no longer use it, probably because of my extensive usage. Who knows how the government makes these decisions? Anyway, I got noticed nationally so I was in line for a beatdown, FAA style. It isn't the first and it won't be the last time, so I am taking it like a man."

For once in **yr. editor's** life, he is at a loss for words to describe his outrage. **Alan Bolton's** response probably says it as well as possible: "Sorry to hear that! There is no telling how many future astronomers and scientists you have lit a spark in through this outreach program. But having worked almost 30 years in the Department of Defense, I certainly understand government bureaucracy and bureaucrats."

The FAA doesn't have an official slogan, so **yr. editor**, no longer speechless, suggests that they adopt the following slogan: "The FAA: We Set Up Programs, And If They're Successful We Knock 'Em Down!"

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. We'll start a busy June with Cox Field observings on **Fri.-Sat., June 4th-5th**. We'll also have a Cox Field observing on **Fri., June 11th**.

Please Note: Our June meeting has been rescheduled as a Swimmin', Eatin' Meetin' at Bill Warren's house on Saturday, June 12th.

As with our **GSV** potluck dinners, FRAC will supply the meat, fixin's and soft drinks, and each family is asked to bring one item to round out the menu. Bring your whole family to swim, play in the pool, dip your toes or just sit at poolside and enjoy our customary FRAC fellowship. We won't have a formal program or guest speaker. You and/or the kids can change clothes in our house, and we have plenty of pool toys for **Larry Higgins** and the other kids.

If you want to swim, come at five o'clock. We'll eat at six. It's even money that **Betty B.** will have recuperated enough from **GSV** to fix one of her mouth-watering carrot cakes, so wear a belt that's big enough to let it out a notch or two after dinner.

To get to Bill's house from, say, Hampton, come S on U. S. Hwy. 19/41. Stay on the 4-lane past Ga. Hwy. 92 (where you normally turn left to go to our UGa-Griffin meetings). Go past the Griffin exit, the Ga. Hwy. 16 (Griffin-Newnan) exit, and past the Williamson Rd. (Ga. Hwy. 362) exit where you'd normally get off the 4-lane and bear right to go to Cox Field.

The first street (and stoplight) beyond Williamson Rd. is Airport Road. Turn left at that stoplight, and then turn right at the 4-way stop at Everee Inn Road. Go one block, and the red brick house on the left just beyond a tall hedge is Bill's house. It's at the corner of Everee Inn Rd. and Roberts St. Turn left at Roberts St., and either park in the wide paved driveway on the left, or drive down the block, turn around and park on Bill's side of the street. There's room for six cars in the driveway.

As noted in the President's Message, our first monthly UGa-Griffin lunar observing will be at sundown on **Thurs., June 24th**. We'll set up our 'scopes on the lawn in front of the area where we hold our meetings. If visitors show up, we'll show them the **Moon**; and if not, we'll look for Lunar Club objects. In either case, you'll get all the help you need in finding objects to show or check off your Lunar list. (We'll even supply the list, pencils, a Moon map and even a telescope or binoculars if you need it.)

The Lunar Club will be a really fun, *easy* project for you, if you'll give it a try. (Call it a Moon shot.) The Moon is by far the brightest object in the night sky, and at 1/2° in dia. it's also extremely easy to find and observe. The terminator and shadows change the appearance of craters, mountains, etc., from day to day, but the Moon's features are changeless. Unlike the planets and deep-sky objects that come and go, the same Moon is up there all year long. Light pollution (or a thin layer of clouds) can actually improve the full Moon's observability by bleaching out some of its brightness.

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Images of GSV 2010
by Bill Warren

First, there were the lovely astro-images produced by **Felix Luciano (M16, Eagle Nebula and M16, Swan Nebula), Doug Maxwell (NGC 4244) and Alan Pryor (NGCs 4038/4039, the Ring-Tail Nebula)**. They were amazing pieces of work – the images, that is, not Felix, Doug and Alan (although they probably qualify in that regard, too) – with the skies’ transparency hovering around 4.8 on Thurs. night.

Then there were other images – the memories we took home with us of a wonderful star party:

***Betty Bentley’s cooking.** Betty worked like her goal was to have everyone gain ten pounds at GSV, and **yr. editor’s** expanded waistline is testimony to her success. Betty prepared two breakfasts, two lunches and midnight munchies galore. As hubby **Steve** put it, “Betty stole the show.”

Enrollment was down a bit this year due to the sluggish economy, and we were expecting to lose money with **GSV ’10**. But according to Steve, thanks to the overwhelming success of Betty’s meals – which was *her* idea, not Steve’s – we actually ended up making a small profit of nearly \$200.

So thanks, Betty, from all of us. You literally saved our bacon.

***Brianna’s thoughtfulness.** Steve & Betty’s granddaughter got an 8” reflector for Christmas, so she didn’t really need the 3” Celestron IYA reflector door prize that **Art Zorka** won and gave to her. She asked Art if he’d mind if she gave it to **Cynthia Armstrong**, who hasn’t yet purchased a telescope. Art agreed, and Cynthia went home with a very nice little telescope that is destined to become a collector’s item.

*Speaking of door prizes, when’s the last time you attended a star party where everyone present won a door prize? There were no Nagler eyepieces to be given away, but rather a *lot* of very good prizes to be won. About a dozen attendees won *two* door prizes.

*We won’t soon forget seeing **Stephen Ramsden** in his bright yellow Sun costume. Stephen said that his petite wife **Natalie** used the XXL Ga. Sky View

shirt he ordered for her as a blanket, which prompted **Alan Bolton** to remark, “Stephen, if your GSV shirt fits like your Sun costume, you might want to trade with Natalie.”

*Doug Maxwell kept everyone in stitches throughout the weekend, and in the process he re-established himself as the funniest guy in the universe. For instance, after staying up till the wee hours of the morning, Doug was asked if he had any trouble getting to sleep. “Yes, I did,” he replied. “I couldn’t get my sleep number dialed in on my mattress in the bunkhouse.”

Later that afternoon, when **Smitty** was changing shirts on the other side of his truck from us, Doug excitedly announced, “Look! Smitty is naked on the observing field!”

*Steve Bentley’s daughter recently found a battered 80mm telescope by the side of the road. She gave it to Steve, whose first thought was to toss it in the trash. But when he had second thoughts and wondered if it might be put to better use as a door prize gag, we swung into action.

At the door prize meeting, we called **Larry Higgins** up to the front. After telling the assemblage about Larry being FRAC’s founder and a guiding light throughout our club’s existence, we told him that we had a small gift for him to express our gratitude for all that he’s meant to us over the years. And in came Steve, carrying the junk telescope.

After two or three steps, Steve “stumbled” – and there went Larry’s “gift,” crashing to the floor and shattering into a jigsaw puzzle of pieces and parts.

***Alan Bolton** went to the kitchen to use the microwave – and found something unearthly growing in there, a green blob that smelled even worse than it looked.

Alan decided that it probably was a baked ham that someone from an earlier gathering at Camp McIntosh had put in the microwave to warm it up and then forgot about it.

***Smitty** owns three tents, thereby tripling his chances of bringing at least one of them to GSV. But

as an added precaution this year, he packed his tent poles on top of his tent and stowed them in his truck. When he arrived at Camp McIntosh and began unpacking, he took out the poles but was mystified when he couldn't find the door flap in his tent. It turned out that all he'd brought were the poles and the tarp that the tent sits on.

***Felix Luciano** pulled an all-nighter Thurs. night. (We call it *Zombie-ing* when someone stays up observing from sunset till dawn.) He'll receive a "Zombie" certificate, but what he really needed the next day was a couple of toothpicks to prop his eyes open.

*Saturday evening was supposed to be rainy. Expecting the worst, several attendees went home early. But the rain never came, and the sky was in fact better than it had been on Thurs. or Fri. night. We experienced a rare quadruple treat that evening: **Venus** and the crescent **Moon** in conjunction, and sunset flybys of the International Space Station and the space shuttle.

***In Memoriam.** Just before Christmas, longtime PSSG and **Georgia Sky View** attendee **Roger Dowiat** suffered a fatal heart attack in his hometown of Mentone, Ala. Roger and his broad Alabama drawl were sorely missed by the many friends he'd made over the years, and **GSV '10** was respectfully dedicated to his memory.

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A Look Back at Georgia Sky View 2010

by **Steve Bentley**, GSV coordinator

Georgia Sky View 2010 is now in the record books, and I do believe that everyone who attended had a good time. A lot of people told me that they enjoyed themselves, and no one complained – at least, not publicly. So I have to conclude that the event went over pretty well. From my perspective, everything went as smooth as silk. I couldn't have asked for better.

GSV is more than just a star party, it's a large family reunion. We see friends and smiling faces that we haven't seen in a year. One of them, **Roger Dowiat**, was missing: he passed away recently. His absence was felt by all of us.

The weather was hot (as expected) in the daytime, but the nights were comfortably cool. We had expected that Thursday night probably would be our best chance for observing, with thunderstorms and rain for the rest of the event. We were pleasantly surprised by the wonderful skies that we got early Fri. morning, though, and it stayed that way throughout the evening and all Saturday as well. We even got to see the ISS and space shuttle pass over. **Felix Luciano** stayed up all night Thursday, and I can't wait to see the astrophotos he got that night.

Our speakers were outstanding.

Stephen Ramsden set up his solar 'scopes and equipment and gave a wonderful presentation. He set up 5-6 telescopes to show the **Sun** in different wave lengths, and the results were splendid, as always.

Phil Sacco put on his fabulous astronomical mythology presentation, and "walk & talk" evening presentations on Fri. & Sat. as well.

Art Zorka's talk on the astronomy of the ancients was fascinating. He talked about Stonehenge and other ancient structures as calendars that helped people organize their lives, plant and harvest their crops, etc.

Tom Crowley's presentation on radio astronomy was enlightening as well as interesting. He told us that visual astronomers with their telescopes have had 400 years to find stuff in the heavens, but have found only about 10% of what has been discovered. The other 90% has been found by radio astronomers. Then he discussed the basics of radio astronomy.

Dr. Richard Schmude talked about recent developments on **Jupiter**. I asked him about the South Equatorial Belt that showed up missing a few months ago. He said it was not at all unusual for such events to occur every 15-20 years.

Our speakers were, without exception, excellent, and the turnout for their talks was outstanding. According to longtime PSSG and GSV goers, the percentage of attendees present for our programs was the highest it's ever been.

We had enough door prizes so that everyone in attendance won a prize of some kind. And if you didn't get what you wanted, **Tim Nix** of The Camera Bug was there and he was giving EXCELLENT deals on whatever you were interested in buying. **Larry** bought two \$20 colored filters for \$5 apiece, **Doug** ordered a 20mW laser pointer for just \$50, and several attendees bought 5mW laser pointers for just \$25.

When there's an eyepiece or other astronomical equipment you need, keep Tim in mind. I doubt that you'll beat his prices anywhere else. And remember: with Tim, the sticker price isn't necessarily the price he's going to charge you. Tell him you were at **Ga. Sky View**, and ask him what kind of deal he'll make for what you want to buy. (You can call Tim at 404-873-4513, fax him at 404-873-3925, or e-mail him at www.camerabug.com.)

With all the interesting and good things going on at this year's event, the prime attraction was **Betty's Breakfast & Lunch Buffet**. It was truly a "man's best dream" – well, almost – because once you got there, you didn't have to leave to go anywhere else for your meals except supper. (And we even had that on Saturday night.) Breakfast offered eggs, pancakes, bacon, sausage, grits and biscuits. Lunch was "make your own" Hoagie sandwiches with chips and a drink. Both meals were very reasonably priced. Betty even served sausage biscuits as midnight snacks, and I think we may have spent more time eating this year than we did observing. This idea and effort was Betty's, and it's a prime factor in the success of this year's event.

Of course, I have to thank everyone who pitched in and helped me with the event – folks like **Bill Warren, Larry Higgins, Dwight Harness, Doug Maxwell** and, of course, Betty. Their work helped to keep things running smoothly throughout.

So with that, **Georgia Sky View 2010** goes into the books as another successful FRAC star party. Now it's time to start planning for next year's party.

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GSV 2010 Letters

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*What a great star party! They get better and better each year! To **Steve Bentley** and all those who

helped make it such a successful event, Thanks! (And a HUGE thanks to **Betty Bentley** for putting together outstanding breakfasts, lunches and midnight snacks for us. All that work made **GSV '10** a great star party. –**Felix Luciano**

***Wes, Phil** and **I** made it home safely today (Saturday). Thanks for hosting a great star party again. Sorry we had to cut it short, but the weather was heading downhill so we thought it better to head home before the rain came. –**Jim Stratton, Greenville, S. C.**

*What can I say? Awesome...I'd come back again next year just for the food! **Steve** did a great job with this one and I know he worked his tail off, but I think **Betty** outdid him. Thanks to Betty for all she did to make **GSV '10** a "Stellar Event" indeed! –**Doug Maxwell**

*Doug is right, thanks to **Steve** and a special thanks to **Betty**. –**Larry Higgins**

*Sally and I would like to express our sincere thanks to **Steve & Betty** for making this year's **GSV** a resounding success. Betty outdid herself with the fantastic breakfasts and lunches. It was a great idea that was enjoyed by all. Both of them gave a GREAT deal of time to pulling off **GSV '10...**

While I think we would all agree that **Steve & Betty** were the stars of the show, they also had a supporting cast including **Bill (Warren), Larry (Higgins), Doug (Maxwell), Dwight (Harness)** and others that I'm sure I'm omitting. But let's give them all a big hand. (Applause.) – **Alan Bolton**

*Yes, I concur. Excellent work, **Bentleys!**
–**Stephen Ramsden**

*Amen to that...It gets better every year! –**Dwight Harness**