



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

April 2025

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History



Ready for blastoff. Ila Jade Komasa's puppy, Nova, is suited up and ready for flight!

OUTREACH SUMMARY

Since the last newsletter, AU volunteers Brandy Ackerman, Andy Allen, Krissie Cook, Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Tessa Flanagan, Brian Green, Art Harris, Ronnie Herron, Sean Kelly, Ila Jade Komasa, David Larson, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Janet & Martin Meza, Bruce Murdock, Edgar Ocampo, Javier Rivera, Michael Robertson, Charles Schueler, Tom Totton, Chuck Watson, Tom Whittemore, and Andre Yew showed cool stuff in the sky to **1647** people, helped by Westmont students and David Feinberg.

SBAU volunteers must have undergone the SBMNH background check, and conform with the SBMNH policies for dealing with the public, to participate in outreach activities. To get vetted, contact SBMNH Volunteer Manager Rebecca Coulter <rcoulter@sbnature2.org>. It's quick and painless.

OUTREACH EVENTS

*There are venue and date changes to some of our regular events this month, so check for ***!*

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, SETUP 7 PM

Telescope Tuesday in the plaza by the theater at Camino Real Marketplace.

FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 7 PM ***

Short planetarium show, followed at 7:30 by our monthly meeting in Farrand Auditorium at SBMNH. This will be a hybrid meeting, also on Zoom. Watch your email or find the link on the SBAU web page. Our speaker will be PhD student Joseph Farah of UCSB, speaking on the Black Hole Explorer satellite to expand the Event Horizon Telescope network for imaging supermassive black holes.

SATURDAY, APRIL 5, SETUP 7 PM ***

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH, next to Palmer Observatory, from 8 PM to 10 PM.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, SETUP 4:30 PM

Telescopes for Science Night from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM at Vieja Valley Elementary School, 434 Nogal Drive, Santa Barbara. It won't be dark, so show the Sun, or just talk about astronomy.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 4 PM

SBAU Monthly Planning Meeting on Zoom. Watch your email or find the link on the SBAU web page.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, SETUP 7 PM ***

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont's Keck Observatory, next to the athletic fields.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, SETUP 6:30 PM

Star Party at Los Flores Ranch Park, 6245 Dominion Road in Santa Maria. We enter via a dirt road to the north past the main entrance - look for the sign.

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, SETUP 7 PM

Star party for residents from all over the Santa Ynez Valley, at Los Olivos Elementary school, 2540 Alamo Pintado Avenue. We'll set up in their back parking lot, adjacent to Hwy 154.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jerry Wilson

When I was about 5 years old, I developed a sudden interest in astronomy. My dad had picked me up from the baby sitter's and was carrying me home. When he leaned over to undo the latch on our front gate, he tipped me backward so I looked straight up. The sky was stunning. We lived about 2000 feet up in the foothills of the Angeles National Forest. The LA smog and light pollution hadn't yet reached our community. To this day I can close my eyes and see the starry sky.

A short time after that I asked my dad if he'd drive me over to where the sky and earth met. He gently explained there was no place like that. In fact we lived on the outside of a large ball. I protested that it couldn't be that way because I could see the blue dome we were under in the daytime and the stars at night. But he insisted on his view of the cosmos. I was shocked at how ignorant of reality my dad was. I thought about it for a while and asked him to not repeat what he had told me when any of my friends were around. I didn't want anyone to know how stupid he was.

The point of this vignette is that people don't automatically come to the correct explanation of what they see all on their own. We humans have evolved a problem-solving technique which we rely on for survival. It works pretty well; after all, look how many people there are. It's not a rigorous technique like science because it fills a different purpose. The purpose of science is to find the right explanation, while the purpose of our native system is to keep us alive. This natural process works on limited, sometimes non-existent data and gives us a feeling of whether there's danger or not. Again it's not designed to be accurate; false positives are fine, but a false negative can be fatal.

We have relied on this belief system for probably a million years, but have only used science for half a millennium. Science and critical thinking are key to our future. As one famous prognosticator said, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it!"

COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING & PURPOSE

Tim Crawford, Christmas 2003

Whether small and insignificant, or rich and famous, or for that matter, anywhere in the scheme of things, there always comes a time when we wonder why we are here. Looking up at the stars recently someone came up to me and curtly asked, "What's the big deal? What's so important about looking at stars? What's with all that? Why are you doing this for a living?" Well, as you know I'm not, and I said as much. I told him, "Look, you live, you die, the end.... You'd better find something to have fun at in the meantime." That was a pretty snotty reply, even if he asked for it. But, I didn't just say that. I added, "People look up at the stars to answer questions like, where did we come from? How did we get here? What is out there and how did it get there? How far are all those stars from us? How big is the Universe? Are there any more life forms out there? Are any like us? Is there just one Universe? How does any of this help us now and in the future?" I was unsettled by all this and looked away and contemplated a moment then looked back to say more but he was gone. What a wasted

moment. I looked back in hindsight with many more answers. We've all been there. I still don't have the perfect words, but here are just a few. I have thought of since...

When we do anything that matters to us, in word or deed, it is rarely a waste of time. What we are doing is out of love. It is not so important why others do not understand, only that we do. It may not make great sense to others, but we see great hope and purpose in our choices. Compassion in this pursuit only deepens our understanding of what it means to be alive. I believe that. I want to believe that. When we speak from the heart, rarely is it wrong, for it mirrors our innermost feelings. In our search for what is meaningful, purpose, and faith in that purpose is what takes us beyond. In the end, that may be enough. Maybe what I could have said that night was, "It may not appear what I'm doing makes any sense, but I get a sense of peace and well being from it as well as humility in imagining how very small we are in the great expanse of things. It's sometimes during these nights it also occurs to me that the distance to the stars may not be as important as the distance between one heart and another."

BETTER THAN ADAPTIVE OPTICS!

Ocular Industries of Noleta, your source for cutting-edge amateur astronomy equipment, is proud to announce our newest astro-imaging product: OINCS. Orders accepted starting April 1.

OINCS is a customized CubeSat, with a unique telemetry frequency for each owner, in which SeeStar automated telescope owners can encapsulate their scope for launch above the atmosphere, resulting in greatly enhanced images. Your fellow astronomers will be amazed!

Ocular Industries will register your frequency with the FCC and NASA. All you'll have to do to begin experiencing the joys of no atmospheric interference is drop your assembled OINCS off at the front gate of Vandenberg SFB for subsequent launch.

Order one now at the special introductory price of only \$9,999.99!

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SBMNH Astronomy Programs Manager CURRENTLY VACANT

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APRIL 2025						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 CAMINO REAL MARKETPLACE 7PM	2	3	4 SBAU MEETING 7PM	5 SBMNH STAR PARTY 8-10PM
6	7	8	9	10 VIEJA VALLEY SETUP 4:30PM 5:30-7:30PM	11	12 PLANNING MEETING 4PM
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25 LOS FLORES RANCH 6:30PM WESTMONT 7PM	26
27 SANTA YNEZ VALLEY 7PM	28	29	30			