RocheStar Fest, Ionia, NY. August, 2025

Back in early spring, I was invited by Mark M, of ASRAS (Astronomy Section of the Rochester Academy of Science) to be their keynote presenter at their annual starparty called RocheStar Fest located at their dark-sky observatory – the Marian & Max Farash Center for Observational Astronomy, located in Ionia, NY. Having known Mark for several years as a long-time Cherry Springs amateur, and having given several Zoom presentations to his club, I happily accepted the invitation. From checking-out ASRA's observatory online, I was excited to be able to camp out over the August weekend and explore the various telescopes there.

Friday 08/15/2025:

With 90 deg temps in PGH, to keep stuff from overheating, I held off packing the camper and car till late Thursday afternoon. By dusk, I had everything loaded and the camper hooked to the SUV.

Waited till 9am Friday morning before heading northwards. (Needed to let the PGH rush-hour wind down as the most efficient route north took me thru downtown).
It was a pleasant drive up I79 to Erie, where I picked-up I86 eastwards. Exited the interstate near Belmont, NY and headed northwards till I reached Ionia, arriving at the ASRAS Farash Observatory about 7 hours after leaving PGH. Once there I met up with Mark M who showed me where to park the camper and then gave me a quick tour of the facility. Eight separate observatories along with an air-conditioned education center and bathrooms. A very impressive site!

After Mark had shown me the ropes and introduced me to a few club members, (Pete, Hank, Tony, Lois, Vicky, James, and many others that I was familiar with from meeting at Cherry Springs), he was needed for starparty setup, so I headed back to camp to settle in. Several ASRAS club members were already setting up their personal telescopes.

Due to the short amount of days I would be onsite, along with a bright 3rd-Quarter Moon rising towards midnight, I decided not to assemble my usual 8" SCT EAA setup. Instead I went with my AllSky cam, a ZWO ASI224MC camera & fisheye lens in a DIY dome attached to a tripod, and my SeeStar S30 smart telescope in EQ mode.
Later that evening, once I had the SeeStar going, I planned on availing myself of views thru the various observatory telescopes.

At 6pm, the attendees met in the Wolk education center and played a musical game of 'Name that Astronomy related Tune', followed by 'Astronomical Jeopardy'. It was a lot of fun!

At dusk, the games ended and the crowd broke up to head to their individual telescopes or to open up one of the observatories.

Back at camp I grabbed a quick bite to eat then after a short wait, Polaris was visible and I could polar align the SeeStar.

Got off on the wrong foot while entering the site longitude in the tablet, I selected 'east' instead of 'west'. The little S30 didn't know where the heck it was pointing and it took me awhile to realize my mistake. (I need to remember when first setting up to use my cell phone so it will automatically get the correct location coordinates). After wasting precious dark-sky, I finally got the S30 settled in on my first target of the night, my favorite Barnard dark nebula – B86 the "Ink Spot" in Sagittarius, near the small open star cluster NGC6550. I had hoped to get in a deep-dive on this reach section of the Milky-Way, but with my delayed start, I could only get in 34 minutes before that section of the sky went behind nearby trees. Here's the EAA Livestack Observation:

(SeeStar S30, 60 second exposures in EQ mode with the IR filter, livestacked for 34 minutes, then AI noise reduction applied in-app)

The transparency had gone a little hazy, with occasional scattered clouds going over, so I decided to go for a stroll and visit with some of the ASRAS folks.

I joined Mike, and about a half-dozen others in one of the observatories where they were using a large 21" reflector to view M27 – the Dumbbell Nebula in

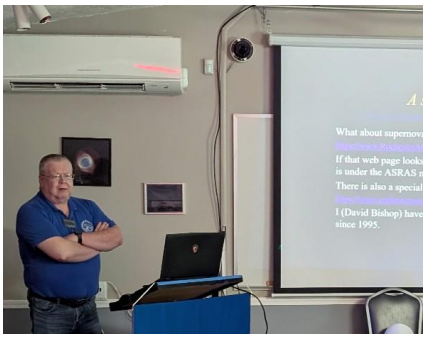
Vulpecula and M57 – the Ring Nebula in the constellation of Lyra. Soon after I had climbed back down from the observing ladder, thicker clouds rolled overhead shutting down the sky. After commiserating with the group, I headed back to my camp. Stayed up reading till after 1am.

Here's a short time-lapse using my AllSky cam: https://youtu.be/-cCKhSKdn8g
(6pm till 1:30am)

Saturday 08/16/2025:
The warm morning had me awake by 8am, and after a quick breakfast and cleaning up, I headed down to the Wolk education building for the day's activities.

I ran into David Bishop who I had met previously, and David took me on a behind-the-scenes tour of all the individual observatories and was able to look at the sun with the club's Ha telescope.

Once back at the education center, it was a full schedule of interesting presentations. While I didn't catch everyone, there was a presentation by Don C on Tycho Brahe. Then Craig K gave a talk about the Sun. That was followed by Mark M and the Almost Heaven Starparty. David Bishop gave a talk on how to use his supernova website. And Doron I gave a talk/demonstration on 3-D printing.

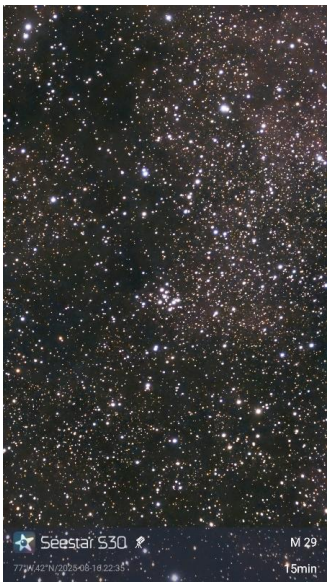


In-between presentations, I checked-out the door prize raffle and silent auction. Dropped a few tickets in hopes of being lucky! ☺

At 5:30pm, the door prizes were pulled, and I did come away a winner!!!
(Gonna make the grandkids happy!)

After getting a group picture taken, everyone headed down the hill across the street to the Ionia Fire Hall for a really nice BBQ dinner and then to settle in for my presentation on Planetary Nebula at 8pm.

Once back at camp, I started-up the SeeStar. (AllSky cam had been running since late afternoon). The sky had gone a little haze, so while the Milky-Way was visible, it was faint, particularly in the south. I decided to stick with observing clusters so I sent the S30 high overhead to Cygnus for open cluster M29 to livestack 20 second exposures for 15 minutes. With the southern sky starting to clear, I slewed the S30 to the M24 star cloud in Sagittarius. (See next page). There I bumped the exposure up to a full 60 seconds and let that livestack for 44 minutes. Next was M39, back up in Cygnus for 20 second exposures livestacked for 20 minutes, then to globular clusters M71 in Sagitta and M56 in Lyra, both using 20 second exposures for around 15 minutes.



(SeeStar S30, 20 second exposures in EQ mode with the IR filter, livestacked for about 15 minutes, then AI noise reduction applied in-app)

Taking a break, I joined a group of ASRAS members using the club's Cave 16" f7 refractor observing Saturn and Titan. Later they pointed the telescope at the core of M31. Several of us then walked down to look thru a Pegasus smart-eye device with club member Eric's 4" Refractor. Also M17 and NGC7331 with its supernova near the core. Beautiful!

I then headed back to camp to continue with cluster observing using the S30.

Finally, around 2am, I decided to call it quits, shutdown and packed away the SeeStar, and headed indoors to bed.

(SeeStar S30, 30 second exposures in EQ mode with the IR filter, livestacked for about 90 minutes, then AI noise reduction applied in-app)

Also, here's a 15 hour time-lapse video made using my AllSky cam:
https://youtu.be/AdD-wuj56B4
Starting at 5pm and running till 8am.
(lost about 2 hours of data, 8 – 10pm, when the camera froze).

Sunday 08/17/2025:
Up at 8am. Packed away the AllSky cam and the SeeStar field tripod in-between breakfast. Around a quarter after 9am, raindrops began flying, and my dilly-dallying with breakfast, got me soaked while hooking up the camper, lol
As I was heading to Cherry Springs, I let the GPS lead, and it took me over Hill and Dale thru the countryside. Fortunately, the rain let up during the drive.

So that brings to a close my first visit to the Farash Center Observatory for RocheStar Fest. A fun astronomical event by a great club!

Larry McHenry
Astronomical Webportal: http://www.stellar-journeys.org/