

# Galactic Gazette

Vol. 26 #1



Member of the  
Astronomical League

A Newsletter of the Kiski Astronomers

Do you remember ... the first sky event of 2007?



*... and this was the beginning!*

A year ago, this sky phenomenon occurred that is rarely seen and was a breath taking sight!

We've all seen a "ring around the moon" but how many of us have seen a "rainbow around the moon!"

I took this and a series of other pictures around 1:15 am on January 3rd, 2007. It was a sight that, I know, I'll never forget! The colors of the rainbow were so vivid and amazing to see against a hazy black sky! Events only got better as the year went on!

## The Next Meeting of the Kiski Astronomers



will be Thursday, January 3, 2008 at 7 PM at  
Kiski High School in the LGI Room.

John Labrecque will present the program for the evening.

Snacks: Tony Orzechowski or Gary Shannon

Drinks: John Labrecque

During the business meeting, the topics for discussion will include the following, in this order:

1. Increasing club presence and visibility
2. By-laws updates
3. Club name change
4. Meeting location change.

Discussion will be limited to no more than one hour, even if we don't finish the list. **If you have any thoughts on these subjects this is a "must attend" meeting!**

**See you there!**

## New Officer for 2008!

At December's banquet, we held elections for our 2008 officers. Here are the winners!

John Labrecque - President

Gary Shannon -V. President

Denny Hill - Secretary

Ed Kuzemchak - Treasurer

Congratulations to all!

*... and now a few words from our new president.*

A new calendar year is upon us. 2007 was a good year for unique observations and also a good year for Kiski Astronomers.

Comet McNaught provided a once in a century show while Comet Holmes had some fireworks of it's own. Some of the old standard meteor showers also had a near banner year with the good weather and little lunar interference.

The club also had a better than average year with several star parties, both public and private, with good weather for most. The larger regional star parties were also blessed with good conditions and a strong representation by our members.

The coming months of 2008 also bode well. Upcoming Mars and Saturn oppositions in addition to the current appearance of Comet Tuttle and a total lunar eclipse in February all combine to start the year off with a bang! Plans are in the works for possible record number of club members at the Texas Star Party. Anticipation of Cherry Springs, Black Forest and other parties is running a close second - at least for me. With the success of club gatherings in 2007 my hope is that schedules and weather cooperates once again.

Nine months of meetings are also part of the month's ahead. The members will be looked upon for participation in regards to programs as well as discussions on increasing memberships, updates to the bylaws and other "fun" stuff. I know the membership is never at a loss for words so I look forward to some lively discussions and possibly some actions to boot.

See you all in January!

John

## It's been Great!

By Ed Kuzemchak

It has been my pleasure to serve as President of the Kiski Astronomers club these last several years. Together, we have set and achieved several important goals for the good of the club and the membership. In 2006, we executed a membership drive that brought several new members to our group. New members and the continued participation of existing members is essential to having a dynamic club that serves all the member's interests, at all levels of astronomy experience. This past year we dramatically increased the number of activities that the club did as a group. A number of members hosted star parties at their homes. Though the sky conditions varied, the result was the same – a good chance to reconnect with people that share a similar enjoyment of this great hobby. The club picnic provided another excellent opportunity for viewing and a meteor shower as a bonus. Club members joined together to attend the various star parties around the country. They brought back all the highlights, recommendations, and reviews of these events for members that could not attend, or who have not yet taken the leap to attend a star party. As we begin a new year of Kiski Astronomers, please lend your full support to the new officers.

Also, take time to renew your own interest in the hobby. We all have busy lives and competition for our free time. With any hobby, keeping one's interest alive is important. Some suggestions that I have for club members in 2008 are:

- 1) Attend one of the large regional star parties. (Cherry Springs, Black Forest, Mason Dixon, Texas Star Party, etc.) I find that attending these events with hundreds of other people in the hobby is a real boost to my own desire to go back and read more, observe more, and learn more.
- 2) Prepare a program for the club. In a future newsletter article, I will discuss my own experiences with preparing programs. If you say 'I have nothing to talk about', I will address that as well.
- 3) Read about your favorite niche in this hobby, or start learning something completely new.
- 4) Get out and observe. Write down your observations and share them with others at the meeting.

I thank you for your support during my term as President. I am looking forward to a new year of continued enjoyment of this fine hobby, combined with the fellowship of others who enjoy it as I do.

Best regards,

Ed Kuzemchak

Former KA President and current Treasurer

## Christmas party

Our December 2007 Christmas party at the Garden Gate Restaurant was a great success! We had over 20 members and their family in attendance.

The buffet had a large variety of entrees to choose from and the desserts were just grand!

The door prize table was piled high with goodies for all to choose from.

Congratulations to Ed Kuzemchak's daughter. She was just fascinated with the 'Starship Earth Globe' on the prize table, and kept hoping her number would be picked first. Dad came to the rescue and grabbed it for her when his number was pulled first!

Everyone enjoyed the extra time we had to socialize with fellow members after dinner this year.

I know I had a great time along with everyone else I talked too!

I'm looking forward to doing it again this year!

Denny

## But Not in Cloudy Pennsylvania!



Gerald DeShirlia photographed M33 and Comet 8P/Tuttle from his drive way in Wimberley, Texas, using a 7-inch refracting telescope and a Canon 20D digital camera.

*Again, we missed another astronomical highlight here in western PA! The "Clear Sky Gods" were not kind to us the other night when Comet 8P/Tuttle posed for a picture beside M33 on January 30th. Luckily other parts of the country and world were able to see it and share their views on the web. Check out [http://spaceweather.com/comets/gallery\\_tuttle\\_page4.htm](http://spaceweather.com/comets/gallery_tuttle_page4.htm) for more photos!*

## 2008 Officers

### President:

John Labrecque  
724-272-4548  
strwvr@zoominternet.net

### Vice President

Gary Shannon  
724-865-1112  
gar@lsp.com

### Secretary

Denny Hill  
724-845-7567  
dhill955@alltel.net

### Treasurer

Ed Kuzemchak  
412-952-5347  
ed@Kuzemchak.com

### Dues for 2008

\$15 adult & family  
\$10 Students

### Magazine Subscriptions

#### Astronomy Magazine

\$34/ year, \$60 for 2 years.

#### Sky & Telescope

\$32.95 first time through club.  
You can renew yourself after that.

#### Astronomy Technology Today

\$18/year  
Subscribe online at:  
[www.astronomytechnologytoday.com/subscribe.asp](http://www.astronomytechnologytoday.com/subscribe.asp)

### Send payments to:

Ed Kuzemchak  
397 Dairy Farm Rd  
New Kensington, PA 15068

### Website:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kiskiastronomers/>

### Club Email List server

Open forum messages  
[kiskiastronomers@yahogroups.com](mailto:kiskiastronomers@yahogroups.com)

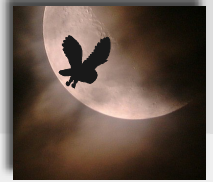
### Dues are Due!!!

Dues for 2008 are due! They are \$15 per family and \$10 for students.

Many members paid at the Christmas Banquet. If you haven't paid, please do so ASAP so we can keep you on our mailing list! You can pay at the meeting or send your payment to:

Ed Kuzemchak  
397 Dairy Farm Rd  
New Kensington, PA 15068

## Nocturnal Notables January 2008



- 02 Earth is at perihelion
- 03 Moon is at apogee
- 04 Quadrantid meteor shower peaks
- 05 Moon passes 7° south of Venus, 1 AM EST  
Moon passes 0.5° south of Antares, 5 AM EST
- 06 Venus passes 6° north of Antares, 9 PM EST
- 08 ○ New Moon, 6:37 AM EST
- 10 Moon passes 0.4° south of Neptune, 8 PM EST
- 12 Moon passes 3° north of Uranus, 8 PM EST
- 15 ● First Quarter Moon, 2:46 PM EST
- 19 Moon is at perigee, 3:33 AM EST  
Moon passes 1.1° north of Mars, 7 PM EST
- 21 Mercury is at greatest eastern elongation (19°) midnight EST
- 22 ● Full Moon, 8:35 AM EST
- 24 Moon passes 0.7° south of Regulus, 10 AM EST
- 25 Moon passes 3° south of Saturn, 1 AM EST
- 28 Mercury is stationary, 2 AM EST
- 30 ● Last Quarter Moon, 12:03 AM EST

### February

- 01 Venus passes 0.6° north of Jupiter, 8 AM EST
- 04 Moon passes 4° south of Jupiter, 1 AM EST
- 06 Mercury is in interior conjunction, 1 PM EST  
Asteroid Hebe is at opposition, 7 PM EST
- New moon, 10:44 PM EST: annular solar eclipse



### The Galactic Gazette

is published & edited by  
**Denny Hill**

Contributions to the newsletter are greatly appreciated!  
Please consider sharing your knowledge and experiences along with any expertise  
with me for future issues!

*This is your newsletter! Make it the best it can be!*  
Email your articles to me at [dhill955@alltel.net](mailto:dhill955@alltel.net)



## MAKE AN OCCULTING BAR

By Terry N. Trees

I recently decided to make an occulting bar. If you're not familiar with occulting bars, they are used to block (occult) bright light sources to ease the observation of their much dimmer neighbors.

My reason for wanting to build one was to try to observe Phobos (magnitude 11.4) and Deimos (12.5), the 2 moons of Mars that are always very close to their brilliant planet and are almost impossible to see. I have seen them through Wagman's Brashear refractor but I have never seen them through my own scopes. Other possible targets might be Jupiter's moons Almathea (14.1) and Himalia (14.6) and Sirius B whose separation from Sirius A is currently increasing.

There are a variety of approaches for the construction of an occulting bar. Some fold-up aluminum foil and stuff it up the object end of an eyepiece. Others similarly mount a small piece of a single-edged razor blade. I'm not sure where I read about the following approach using a planetary filter, but I will tentatively credit it to Stephen James O'Meara, the skilled observer who is a frequent speaker at the Texas Star Party. The advantage to using a half filter rather than a traditional occulting bar is that it allows you to see the location of the bright planet or star you are occulting. This

makes it easier to locate the positions of much dimmer targets. Here's what I did:

1. Obtain a violet or dark blue planetary filter for about \$15 - \$20.
2. Remove the filter from its cell.
3. Use a straight-edge and a glass cutter to etch the glass and then break it in half.
4. Rub the cut edge over a piece of emery cloth or sand paper to remove any rough spots.
5. Mount one-half of the filter in the filter cell.
6. Screw the filter/cell onto various eyepieces until you find one that gives a sharply focused occulting bar edge.
7. When observing, simply rotate the eyepiece and thus the bar to the desired angle.

That's pretty simple and handy, too. It allows the filter to be used on a variety of eyepieces. Except in my case, while I could get the filter close to focus with a few eyepieces, I was unable to get a sharply focused edge on any of them. (A sharply focused edge is critical.) In fact, the focal point I needed to reach appeared to be inside most Naglers and Radians.

My first thought was to give the cell to the machine shop teacher at the local vo-tech school and ask that the outside cell threads be extended the entire length of the cell. That

would allow it to be screwed to any depth in the eyepiece barrel and allow it to be used on at least some of my eyepieces. While I still may do that, I found an easier solution.

I noticed that my old (~1965) 25 mm Edmund Scientific orthoscopic eyepiece had a field stop mounted in its barrel. After sanding its edge, I dropped the second half of the filter on the inside of the field stop and screwed the barrel back on the eyepiece. Viola, a perfect focus! 3 drops of superglue and the filter was mounted.

New Year's Eve provided some early evening "clear" skies. I tested the occulting bar eyepiece with my 8" LX-200. It worked perfectly. Many very dim background stars suddenly appeared as I moved Mars behind the purple filter. Mars itself was dimly visible through the filter unless it was right at the edge. I imagine that the edge set up some sort of interference pattern that completely blocked the planet's image there.

While I did not locate Phobos and Deimos, I later realized that I should have used a Barlow and increased the magnification from about 80x to around 240x. Of course an 8" scope may be of insufficient size. I'll try this on our 17.5" Dob as well.

# Galactic Humor!

## Police Those Star Parties!

Submitted by Gary Shannon

The star parties staged by our astronomy club were becoming unruly and chaotic. Perhaps you've noticed the same trend in your own club observing sessions. Do your typical group nights consist of telescopes careening rapidly from one bright object to another - a minute on M13, another minute for the Andromeda Galaxy, a brief glimpse at the Ring Nebula? Observing at excessive speeds is a common infraction. Another is the stunting that some observers revel in. They claim to see targets like Palomar 4, a magnitude 14 globular cluster, in a 4-inch telescope and then have the nerve to boast for all to hear, "But it's real easy to see!"

Another insidious practice that is becoming more widespread occurs when lazy observers rush over to see an object that a more disciplined amateur has found after spending half the night star-hopping to its obscure location. Such thievery of photons is unconscionable. What's more, these parasitic observers then glance through the victim's finderscope or Telrad finder so they can sight the location of the target and quickly sweep up the same object in their telescopes. They then add insult to injury by claiming to have found the object themselves. Such claims are illegitimate in our minds. Guilty parties should be stripped of their Messier badges.

The disorderly conduct was becoming too much to handle. The trend had to stop. To stem the tide of unruly observing, our club formed a much-feared but effective Observing Police. Their job: bring discipline and good observing skills to the uncontrolled nighttime mob. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it.

To enforce order, our Observing Police regularly patrol local star parties. Armed with red flashlights, they inspect observers and hand out citations for any observing they feel does not conform to the high

standards we are attempting to instill. Citations that the Police have recently issued include:

a.. OBSERVING TOO QUICKLY - A speed of 5 objects per hour is in force at our observing site. All objects must be sketched and sketches must be available for inspection during random spot checks. PENALTY: Confiscation of eyepieces.

b.. OPERATING A TELESCOPE IN AN UNSAFE MANNER - Includes bonking people on the head with the tube of a long refractor or wiring a telescope tube to a high-voltage generator to create a giant "dew-zapper" effect. PENALTY: Observing with said telescope.

c.. STUNTING - Such as claiming to see invisible objects. PENALTY: Thirty days Solar observing. A further crime is claiming to actually see detail in invisible objects. PENALTY: Immediate promotion to club president.

d.. RECKLESS OBSERVING - You're guilty if you think you see objects not actually being viewed. (such as exclaiming that "the Cocoon Nebula is really bright!" when the telescope is pointed at the Andromeda Galaxy). Also includes viewing objects with inappropriate filters and magnifications (such as scanning the Pleiades at 900X with an O III filter). PENALTY: One night in the Coma-Virgo galaxy cluster with a 60 mm telescope and an old Norton's Star Atlas as your only guide.

e.. IMPAIRED OBSERVING - On one occasion an observer was caught trying to find an apparently interesting object called NGP. "But it's marked right here on my atlas!" He protested, not realizing the object was, in fact, the North Galactic Pole. Carefully searching for deep-sky objects with a sub aperture planetary mask in place over a Dobsonian is also subject to ticketing. TYPICAL PENALTY: Tracking down all the Messier objects in numerical order.

f.. IMPERSONATING AN OBSERVER - Infractions include arriving at an observing site in July with a 20-inch telescope with the intention of observing the Orion Nebula. Or owning a 20-inch telescope with digital setting circles and never looking at anything except the brightest Messier objects. PENALTY: A mandatory one-night Messier Marathon WITHOUT the digital circles. Our Observing Police have also found a lucrative method of raising money for Club activities - mostly to purchase Nagler eyepieces for all the club executives. We now require that all observers buy observing licenses. We set the highest fees for the brightest objects. This discourages people from partaking in the tiresome and unproductive practice of observing the same bright objects over and over again.

Our license fee structure is as follows:

Moon \$1000.00

Planet \$500.00

Galaxy \$20.00

Planetary Nebula \$10.00

Orion Nebula \$1000.00

All other diffuse nebulae \$2.50

M13 \$1000.00

All other globulars \$1.50

Open clusters and double stars, FREE.

Comets and Meteors, 3 for \$1.00.

In addition, novice observers must obtain a learner's permit, at a cost of \$50.00.

By enforcing these regulations we have found that our star parties are now much easier to manage. Gone is the boisterous, uncontrolled enthusiasm of the past. The chaos has been replaced by a quiet, disciplined observing that is a credit to amateur astronomy. Perhaps your club will follow our lead.