

SWRAL Newsletter

Benjamin Jones, Editor

CTAS and the Paul and Jane Meyer Observatory

On June 9th, the Central Texas Astronomical Society (CTAS) held a dedication dinner and ceremony to celebrate the completion of the Paul and Jane Meyer Observatory at the Charles and Dorothy Turner Research Station near Clifton, Texas.

**CTAS President Dean Chandler
Officiates at
Telescope Dedication**



I had the honor to attend the event and see the observatory first hand, and I can summarize my experience by saying, "Wow!"

The Meyer Observatory boasts a fully domed 24" research-grade telescope constructed by Astronomical Consultants & Engineers, and is fully automated where it can easily be controlled from the downstairs control room or over the internet. Two CCD cameras are attached to the telescope at all times; one for planetary and lunar studies, and the other for deep sky imaging. However, for those of us who

just want to stick an eyepiece in and observe the old fashioned way, the telescope utilizes a 45° angled mirror at the base to allow direct eyepiece observing.

(Continued on page 3)

Dear SWRAL Members

Welcome to the first ever newsletter of the Southwest Region of the Astronomical League (SWRAL)! It is an exciting time for the SWRAL as we make some changes in the overall organization.

As I type this, a new website, www.swral.org is being developed by Ed Flaspoeehler, former *Reflector* editor, and expert in web development and publishing services. On it, you will

find information on the SWRAL annual meeting, club links and activities, newsletters, contact info, and much, much more! The website will be the official online station for the SWRAL and we hope that you will frequent it often.

The SWRAL is home to dozens of astronomy clubs in New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. The chief purpose of the SWRAL is to be a unifying force that ties all

the clubs together within the larger Astronomical League. To this end, a SWRAL website and newsletter provide an excellent medium by which the various clubs can share their projects and success stories. We hope that your club will be a part of this effort. We look forward to your input as the newsletter continues.

Until Next Time!

Benjamin Jones
SWRAL Vice-Chairman



SWRAL

Southwest Region
of the Astronomical League

Special points of
interest:

- > Welcome to the New SWRAL Newsletter!
- > SWRAL Clubs and Regional Officers
- > Public Outreach and Amateur Observing Activities

Inside this issue:

Eagle Eye Observatory	2
Meyer Observatory	3
CLASS	4
Ten Acre Observatory	4
OKC Observatory	5
Las Cruces Star Party	5
George Observatory	6

The 12-inch Harlan J. Smith Telescope at Eagle Observatory



The Eagle Eye Observatory at Canyon of the Eagles

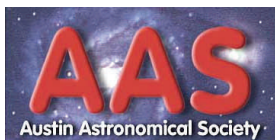
The observatory is a sliding-roof design with two independently movable roof sections, which allows flexibility to accommodate a variety of public and private star parties.

The Austin Astronomical Society operates and maintains the Eagle Eye Observatory dark-sky site at Canyon of the Eagles Lodge and Nature Reserve, located on Lake Buchanan about 15 miles northwest of Burnet, TX. Canyon of the Eagles is a beautiful reserve that attracts families from around the state, and is an excellent location for an observatory geared towards the public.

The Eagle Eye Observatory houses the 16-inch Ealing Educator Telescope, a research-grade Cassegrain, and a 12.5-inch Harlan J. Smith Newtonian Telescope. Both telescopes have been beautifully refurbished by club members and are open to members of AAS and the general public on most weekend nights. The observatory is a sliding-roof design with two independently movable roof sections, which allows flexibility to accommodate a variety of public and private star parties.

Like many observatories throughout the nation, light pollution is beginning to take its toll on them, and the Eagle Eye is no different. As major development is taking place in this area of Texas, the light pollution is making it more and more difficult to observe the night skies. Take action! Speak at local city council meetings and talk with fellow residents. Observatories like the Eagle Eye are worth saving!

Despite the light pollution, Eagle Eye is not moving, so if you ever find yourself in Burnet, TX, be sure to check out the Eagle Eye Observatory and Canyon of the Eagles. Lodging is available in the reserve to anybody interested, so make a weekend out of it!



Austin Astronomical Society



CTAS and the Meyer Observatory

(Continued from page 1)

The observatory only became a reality after Charles and Dorothy Turner donated 5 acres of land to CTAS in 2000. At first, the land served as their observing site, but in the words of CTAS president Dean Chandler, “We dreamed big!” CTAS envisioned a research grade observatory where they could carry out their three official tasks: education, research, and star gazing.

By 2001, the Paul and Jane Meyer Foundation had donated \$375,000 for the construction of an observatory and telescope on the land. Although it seemed natural to focus the entire club’s attention on the building of the observatory, CTAS continued to hold public star parties, present at local schools, and support astronomy related education efforts throughout the Waco area. As many of us know, outreach and education alone can consume most of a club’s resources, but the fact that CTAS was able to continue outreach while working on the observatory is amazing, and illustrates their excellent leadership and hard-working member base.

When the observatory was completed in 2004, CTAS immediately began bringing children out for overnight lock-ins and astronomy education classes. As 2005 rolled around, the University of Texas at Austin’s Department of Astronomy created a partnership with CTAS to enlist their assistance on white dwarf star research. University students would use the Meyer telescope to search for planets around white dwarf stars in the Milky Way. Some of the data gathered from the Meyer telescope has been critical in locating these elusive extra-solar planets.

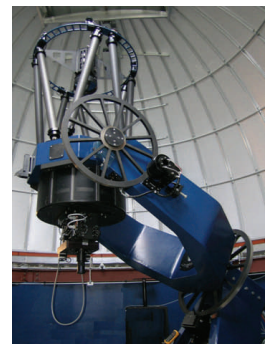
All in all, the dedication was a wonderful tribute to the hard work and contributions that CTAS members and their donors have put into the observatory. I encourage all of you to take a trip up to the Clifton area and check out the observatory and the wonderful programs CTAS has to offer. This is yet another example of good people who are successfully increasing student involvement and access to astronomy and astronomy education.

**The Central Texas
Astronomical Society
owns and operates
the Paul and Jane
Meyer Observatory
at a dark sky site
near Clifton, Texas.**



**The Meyer
Observatory boasts
a fully domed 24”
research-grade
telescope**

**The Meyer telescope is
a research grade
instrument designed
and installed by
Astronomical
Consultants and
Equipment, Inc., of
Tucson, AZ**





The purpose of the City Lights Astronomical Society for Students (CLASS) is to take astronomy into urban areas and to show young people that they have choices when it comes to interests, and that students can be interested in science either as a hobby, or as a career, as well as follow traditional pursuits.

CLASS was founded by longtime astronomy veteran John Wagoner of the Texas Astronomical Society in Dallas. The purpose of CLASS is to take astronomy into urban areas and to show young people that they have choices when it comes to interests, that students can be interested in science either as a hobby, career, as well as follow traditional pursuits. Their goal is to provide service to the underserved areas of their communities.

John, current president of CLASS, in his report at the annual SWRAL meeting this past May, said CLASS is growing and has opened several chapters outside of Texas. Many of the activities CLASS organizes are local star parties in urban areas. Children and adults come out to hear CLASS members speak about astronomy and show them the beautiful heavens above them.

CLASS will also, free of charge, come to urban schools to present astronomy slideshows, solar observing sessions, and star parties.

John reported that CLASS received a donation of a portable planetarium that he puts in the back of his van and drives to local schools.

On top of the outreach programs that CLASS is involved with, they also operate 3 different observing programs; naked eye, binocular, and telescopic. Upon completing one of these programs, CLASS will present the awardees a certificate, lapel pin, and membership to the Astronomical League.

One of the most wonderful aspects of CLASS is that membership and participation in any of the programs they offer is free of charge.

CLASS would love to recruit members in other cities across the USA, so if you are interested in learning more or in opening up your own chapter, contact John Wagoner at www.citylightsusa.org

John Wagoner, CLASS,
1409 Sequoia Dr.,
Plano, Tx. 75023,
email : john@classusa.org.

Odyssey Astronomy Club of Greater Oklahoma City



Odyssey Astronomy Club of
Greater Oklahoma City

The Odyssey Astronomy Club of the greater Oklahoma City area is proud to call the Ten Acre Observatory their home.

Located southeast of the Oklahoma City area, the TAO is open for use by the public schools, civic organizations, astronomy clubs, and the general public at no cost.

The club has a 100' X 200' observing field and onsite 13" Odyssey telescope. Services

at the TAO include a Guided Tour of the Night Sky and astronomy information sessions.

For more information about the TAO, contact the Odyssey Astronomy Club through their online website.

<http://hometown.aol.com/orion2c/tenacreobservatory.html>

OKC Astronomy Club's Cheddar Ranch Observatory

If you have ever heard of the Okie-Tex Star Party, then you should know that it is the Oklahoma City Astronomy Club that helps put it on. For many years now, Okie-Tex (held in southern Oklahoma) has been another major star party in our region that draws guests from all over the country.

On top of Okie-Tex, the Oklahoma City club is working on improving their dark-sky observing site at Cheddar Ranch by adding several large buildings with roll-off roofs to serve as a permanent onsite observatory. Work areas, storage rooms, classrooms, restrooms, etc. are also being added to provide guests and members with an enjoyable experience. Believe it or not, restrooms can make or break a dark-sky observing site. Many city folks do not like the fact of going to some remote location for the night without the simple comforts of a

toilet and sink. Having a restroom should substantially increase the number of guests at their star parties.

The observatory, once finished, will draw people from nearby Oklahoma City and will expand the public's opportunity to look through large telescopes. With the lecture facility, school groups can come out, spend the night, and learn a thing or two about astronomy. The club plans to hold public events once a month during the first quarter moon. Since the telescopes and equipment will be onsite, it will be much easier for them to host public events and to accommodate groups of varying sizes.

Most importantly, it will be a place the Oklahoma City club can call home and will serve the residents of Oklahoma for a long time to come.

Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

It is an exciting time for the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces, New Mexico! The club is working on securing a 16-inch Meade LX-200 telescope from New Mexico State University to be used at public star parties and at the club's dark sky site at Leesburg State Park.

This is a great opportunity for the club to attract the public to their events and outings and make astronomy more accessible for the people around the Las Cruces area.

The club is talking about putting in a concrete pad and observatory building at the state park because of its dark skies and access to the public.

This is another great example of where local astronomy clubs are hard at work bringing large telescopes within reach of the general public. Good luck guys and keep us up-to-date on your project!



Oklahoma City
Astronomy Club

No hobby can inspire people and fire up their imagination quite like astronomy. We seek to bring the wonders of the universe to everyone 'first hand'.

Astronomical Society of
Las Cruces



Solar Observing at Las Cruces Renaissance Fair

11-inch refractor right side mounted on 36" Gueymard telescope at George Observatory



There are three domed telescopes at the George Observatory; the largest is the 36-inch Gueymard Research Telescope, one of the largest telescopes in the nation open to the public on a regular basis. The George Observatory has a new 11 inch F 15 refracting telescope donated by Preston and Donna Engbretson of Houston, Texas. The 11 inch is mounted on the Gueymard 36" (.9 meter) RC Tinsley Reflector.

The George Observatory

A Research Grade Facility with Direct Public Access

For many years now, volunteers from the Houston Astronomical Society (HAS), Fort Bend Astronomical Society (FBAC), and other Houston area clubs, have spent their Saturday nights at the George Observatory opening the doors of a research grade facility to the public.

Part of the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the George Observatory is located in Brazos Bend State Park, about 30 miles southwest of Houston. The centerpiece of the site is the 36 inch Gueymard Research Telescope, which is not only used for research, but is open to the public on Saturday nights. The observatory also boasts an 18 inch reflector and a 14 inch Celestron Schmidt-Cassegrain housed next to the 36 inch.

On top of being an observatory, the George also houses a Challenger Learning Center that gives participants an opportunity to be part of a simulated space mission. Students from elementary to high school take part in one of various space missions where they learn to take control of a space craft and space station as they face the many perils that space has to offer. Teamwork, responsibility, and knowledge are all tested at the Challenger Learning Center.

Barbara Wilson, the director of the George Observatory, also tells me that the observatory routinely hosts astronomy day camps and seminars for students on school field trips. Students are given first class treatment as they play and learn in the astronomy lecture room, see sun spots on the sun with the solar telescope, and enjoy a picnic lunch under the many trees that line the Brazos River.

Because of its close proximity to Houston, light pollution has been washing out the once magnificent skies above the observatory. For many years now, concerned volunteers at the George have been pushing for restrictive outdoor lighting ordinances in nearby counties. The group has made headway and has successfully passed some of the best outdoor lighting ordinances in the nation. Their hard work and commitment is something that we all should be proud of.

I have spent many summers volunteering at the George and it really is top notch. If you have never been to it, go and see what it is all about. The volunteers would love to have you come out and see what they are doing.

Keep up the good work!



Children experience science at the George Observatory

Southwest Region of the Astronomical League

SW Region of the Astronomical League (SWRAL) is one of the regions of the Astronomical League. It consists of member clubs and At-Large members located in Texas, New Mexico, and portions of Oklahoma.

While SWRAL has assisted area clubs with events such as Okie-Tex Star Party and Hill Country Astronomers Spring Banquet, the main focus has been its involvement with the annual Texas Star Party.

Meetings

The SWRAL holds its annual meeting each year during the week of TSP, where there is the prospect of high (and convenient) attendance by SWRAL clubs.

If an SWRAL club would like to hold a regional meeting or event and needs the assistance of SWRAL, please contact one of the SWRAL officers listed in the box on this page.

SWRAL Clubs and Organizations

- Alamogordo Astronomy Club
- Amarillo Astronomy Club
- Astronomical Society of Las Cruces
- Astronomical Society of North Texas
- Astronomical Society of South East Texas
- Austin Astronomical Society
- Central Texas Astronomical Society, Inc.
- City Lights Astronomical Society for Students
- Clovis Astronomy Club
- Crossroads Astronomy Club
- El Paso Astronomy Club
- Fort Bend Astronomy Club
- Fort Worth Astronomical Society
- Houston Astronomical Society
- Kingsville Astronomical Society
- Leonardo's Star Quest Astronomy Club
- North Houston Astronomy Club
- Odyssey Astronomy Club
- Oklahoma City Astronomy Club
- Rio Rancho Astronomical Society
- Roswell Astronomy Club
- San Angelo Astronomy Association
- South Plains Astronomy Club
- Tarrant Co. College, NE Campus, Astronomy Club
- Texas Astronomical Society of Dallas
- Texas Star Party, Inc.
- West Texas Astronomers



Southwest Region
of the
Astronomical League

**Did you Know
that there are
27 astronomy
clubs and
organizations
in the SWRAL?**

2007-08 SWRAL Officers

- Chairman:
Dave Clark, Austin
cdave@austin.rr.com
- Vice-Chairman:
Benjamin Jones, San Antonio
benjamin_jones2@yahoo.com
- Secretary:
Anne Adkins, Austin
anne@hadkins.com
- Treasurer:
Michael Ohl, Garland
mohl@gte.net
- Regional Representative
(expires 2009):
John Wagoner, Plano
astrowagon@comcast.net



SWRAL
9322 Tyler Oaks
Helotes, TX 78023

SWRAL
Southwest Region
of the Astronomical League

Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Mailing Address Line 3
Mailing Address Line 4
Mailing Address Line 5

Phone: 210-378-0835
E-mail: benjamin_jones2@yahoo.com

The Astronomical League

is a not-for-profit alliance of amateur astronomical societies whose purpose is:

- *To promote the science of astronomy;*
- *By fostering astronomical education;*
- *By providing incentives for astronomical observation and research; and*
- *By assisting communication among amateur astronomical societies.*

The Regions of the Astronomical League provide a place for amateur astronomers to meet other astronomers in the same area and learn from each other. Each Region has its own regional officers and its own regional convention.

Become a Member
of the South West Region of the Astronomical League.

Join one of the 27 astronomy clubs in Texas, Oklahoma or New Mexico!



[http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/
group/swral/](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/swral/)