

The Springfield

News from the STARS



Stars Club

"Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky"

SINCE 1934

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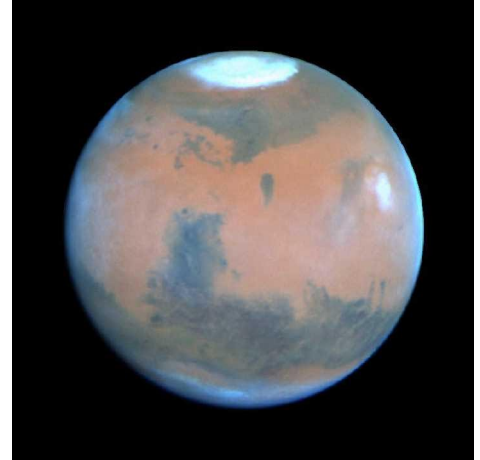


"On the Horizon"

Even before Halley's Comet had completely faded from view in April of 1986, I was already looking forward to my next great observing experience. That summer Mars was at opposition. Like so many others before me had been, I was captivated by the Red Planet. From Schiaparelli's "canali" (channels) to Lowell's "oases" to *The War of the Worlds* and beyond, no other planet has so inspired human imagination. Struggling to keep my small refractor trained on Mars, I kept watch through the eyepiece as its rusty orb shimmered due to its low altitude in the southern sky. Then, without warning and for only a mere instant, a glint of bright white appeared! Satisfied, I packed up my telescope and went to bed, where I would dream of what the polar ice cap I had just seen might really be like.

This year, a new generation will dream of Mars. In the coming months, the Earth will draw ever closer to it, leading to another summer opposition. But this will be no ordinary opposition – in late August the Earth and Mars will lie closer together in space than they have at any other time in recorded history. Following the success of the Sojourner rover during the Mars Pathfinder mission in 1997, NASA plans to launch two more rovers to Mars this spring, while the planet steadily brightens in our sky. The April "Stars Over Springfield" program will feature a look at these latest planetary missions. Then, join us at the May club meeting as we "explore" the Red Planet for ourselves.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the club for helping to make the past three years a memorable experience for me. It has been a great honor to serve the Stars Club as its president – something I could not possibly have dreamed of while viewing Mars as a child. I look forward to continuing to contribute to the club in the future.



- Mike Kozicki

Congratulations, Jack!

Congratulations and best wishes to **Jack Megas**, who has been elected as the Stars Club's new president!

The Korkosz Award Presentation

Congratulations to Stars Club and Springfield, VT Telescope Makers member **Dave Kelly**, the 2002 recipient of the Frank D. Korkosz Award for Outstanding Contributions to Astronomy. In addition to sharing his passion for telescope making with others, Dave has served as the head of the Mechanical Judging Committee at Stellafane for the past eleven years. The Korkosz Award was presented to Dave in front of *The Gemini Observatory* at last summer's club picnic in Buckland.

The Astronomy Association Dinner

The 11th Annual Astronomy Association Dinner will be held on Saturday, April 19th at the American Legion Hall on Route 9 in Hadley. Social hour begins at 7:00pm with dinner at 8:00pm. This event unites members of the Stars Club, the 5A's, Arunah Hill and other area astronomy groups. For more information, contact **Tom Whitney** via email at amastro@amastro.org or by phone at (413) 256-6234.

Transit!

On the morning of Wednesday, May 7th, the Sun will rise with a small blemish near its western (upper) limb. That blemish will be the planet Mercury, passing in front of the Sun's disk. Unfortunately, most of the event will have already taken place before sunrise occurs along the east coast of the U.S. Only Mercury's egress from the Sun will be visible from the eastern U.S. at a very low altitude. But this is the first transit of Mercury since 1999 and an excellent opportunity to "warm up" in time for the long-awaited transit of Venus due to occur one year from now on the morning of June 8, 2004. For more information, visit the NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center site at <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/OH/transit03.html>.

NOTICES

Executive Committee Meeting - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held on ***Tuesday, June 3rd***. If you have ideas for events or speakers, notices for the newsletter, or anything else you would like to bring to the club's attention, please contact one of the officers or directors prior to this meeting.

Club Newsletter – If you have an email address and would prefer to receive the club newsletter electronically rather than by traditional mail, please contact one of the officers or directors. Several members have already chosen this method, which will hopefully save the club time and expense.

Membership Dues – If you have not yet paid your club dues for 2003, please send a check for \$20, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101. Your dues offset costs of running the club, mostly the museum room rental fee and mailings.

Sky & Telescope – Club members are entitled to subscribe to Sky & Telescope magazine for \$29.95 per year. If you need to renew your subscription, return the renewal card you received in the mail and a check for \$29.95, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101.

We Still Need You! – Volunteers are needed to help out at club meetings, for "Stars Over Springfield" programs and public star parties. If you have a telescope you can set up, that's great! Even if you don't, there are still ways in which you can help, including assisting with crowd control. We have experienced higher attendance at our programs in recent years. To volunteer for an event, please see one of the club officers or directors.

Club Website – If you have material you would like to contribute to the club website, please let one of the club officers or directors know.

THE OBSERVING LOG

Eclipse! The first of two total lunar eclipses visible from the eastern U.S. takes place on the night of Thursday, May 15th-Friday, May 16th. The umbral portion of the eclipse begins at 10:02pm EDT and ends at 1:17am, with the Moon in total eclipse for 53 minutes, from 11:13pm to 12:06am. The year's second total lunar eclipse will take place during the convenient evening hours of Saturday, November 8th.

Major Planets Jupiter and Saturn will remain prominent in the evening sky through much of spring. Meanwhile, the planets Venus and Mars begin the year in the southeast at dawn. Keep an eye on Mars as it begins to brighten dramatically in the morning sky during May and June.

A Minor Planet The asteroid 4 Vesta reaches opposition on March 26th against the stars of Virgo. Around that date, Vesta will be at its brightest, magnitude 5.9, putting it within reach of the unaided eye in a clear, dark sky.

Full Moon Dates: January 18, February 16, March 18, April 16, May 15, June 14

New Moon Dates: January 2, February 1, March 2, April 1, May 1, May 31, June 29

Vernal Equinox (Start of Spring) – March 20, 2003 at 8:00p.m. EST.

Summer Solstice – June 21, 2003 at 3:10p.m. EDT.