

The Springfield

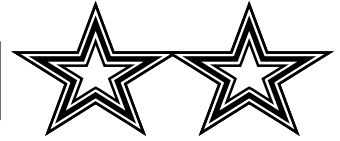
News from the STARS

“Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky”

SINCE 1934



January, 2006



“On the Horizon”

For such a small world, distant Pluto has certainly gained its share of attention of late. Last year was the 75th anniversary of its discovery by Clyde Tombaugh in 1930, but it has been in the news for many other reasons in recent years. As 2005 drew to a close, Pluto found itself in the headlines again, with the announcement that the Hubble Space Telescope had found two additional satellites of the icy world, joining Charon (discovered by James Christy of the U.S. Naval Observatory in 1978), as moons of Pluto. To date, spacecraft launched from Earth have visited every planet in the solar system, except Pluto. But that is about to change, and so Pluto will soon be in the headlines yet again.

With a primary launch window that opens on January 11th and lasts for thirty-five days, the New Horizons mission represents our first effort to explore Pluto close-up. The project is a joint effort between NASA, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the U.S. Department of Energy, the Southwest Research Institute and the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. If all goes well and according to plan, New Horizons should arrive at Pluto in July 2015, a little less than ten years from now. Following a flyby of the Pluto system, the mission will continue on to explore many more objects in the Kuiper Belt.

But what exactly is New Horizons going to study? With discoveries of other objects in the outer solar system such as Sedna, Quaoar, and now 2003 UB₃₁₃, which is larger than Pluto and is being called “the tenth planet” by many, is it time to rethink Pluto’s status as a planet, as many have suggested? And if we do, what should Pluto be called? Is creating a scientific definition of the term “planet” the answer, or do we need a broader classification system given the large number of new objects being discovered? The Stars Club will tackle the issue with a debate at our May meeting. Whatever we end up calling Pluto, it’s unfortunate that Clyde Tombaugh didn’t live a little longer to see the launch of New Horizons; the mission’s launch window includes February 4th, which would have marked his 100th birthday.

Mission to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt

NEW HORIZONS



“THE FIRST MISSION TO THE LAST PLANET”
But Is It Really?

- Mike Kozicki, Editor

Going Once, Going Twice ... Sold!

At its upcoming February meeting, the Stars Club will hold a live auction. Proceeds from the event will be put toward the honorarium for a prominent guest speaker in the near future. The success of the event will greatly depend on participation from club members. If you have unwanted astronomical items that you would be willing to donate to the club for the auction, please contact Jack Megas at 782-3962. Then, mark your calendar for February 28th and join us for this fun-filled evening to benefit our club.

Korkosz Award Nominations

Now that 2005 is over, it’s once again time to consider nominees for the Star Club’s Korkosz Award, given annually to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to astronomy in the northeast. The award is given in memory of former Springfield Science Museum director and planetarium pioneer Frank D. Korkosz. If you would like to nominate someone for the award, please contact a club officer or director.

Stars Over Springfield

Our monthly public observing program at the Science Museum remains well attended. At the November event, nearly one hundred people packed the Tolman auditorium for a chance to see Mars through the Museum's 20-inch telescope and were delighted with excellent views of the Red Planet. Volunteers are always needed to help out, whether that means setting up a small telescope outside Tolman, giving a brief talk on astronomy, answering questions, or just helping to guide people upstairs to the observatory.

Many Thanks for a Celebration Unlike Any Other!

The Stars Club wishes to thank the Gerry and Kelly families for hosting yet another wonderful club picnic, our 25th, last August. Although skies were cloudy, that couldn't dampen the spirits of those in attendance. A special thanks goes to **Edie Gerry** for allowing us to again hold the picnic at her home. In addition to the food and fun, attendees also had a first-hand look at the recent renovations to the Gemini Observatory.

NOTICES

Executive Committee Meeting - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held in late spring. 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 club officers or directors prior to April 30.

Club Election Results – Elections for the 2006 club officers and directors were held at the November meeting. Congratulations to **Amanda Jermyn**, who is a new club director, and thanks again to **Paul Cardone**, who served as a club director for many years before deciding to step down at the end of 2005. For a complete list of the 2006 club officers and directors, see the back of the Calendar of Events.

Membership Dues – If you have not yet paid your club dues for 2006, please send a check for \$20, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101 as soon as possible. Your dues offset costs of running the club, mostly the museum room rental fee and mailings. PLEASE help to support your club! Also, if you would like to become a member of the Stars Club, contact Rich or see him at an upcoming club meeting.

Sky & Telescope – One of the benefits of membership in the Stars Club is a reduced-rate subscription to Sky & Telescope magazine for just \$32.95 per year. If you are already a club member and wish to renew your subscription, return the renewal card you received in the mail and a check for the proper amount, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101.

Spring Forward – Don't forget to set your clocks ahead one hour for Daylight Saving Time at 2:00a.m. Sunday, April 2nd. Standard time will resume again at 2:00a.m. Sunday, October 29th. Due to the Energy Policy Act of 2005, signed into law by President Bush last August 8th, this is the final year of the current format for Daylight Saving Time. Beginning in 2007, it will run from the second Sunday in March until the first Sunday in November.

THE OBSERVING LOG

The Pleiades and the Moon For the first time since March 1991, occultations of the Pleiades star cluster by the Moon will resume for North American observers this year. Although the Moon currently passes in front of the cluster as seen from somewhere on Earth monthly, only the events of April 1st, July 20th, October 9th-10th and December 4th can be seen from New England. The event during Saturday evening, April 1st will feature a thin waxing crescent Moon, with individual stars vanishing from view on the Moon's dark limb.

Gas Giant Oppositions Saturn reaches opposition in Cancer on January 27th, when you'll find it within a degree or two of the Beehive star cluster. Jupiter spends the year in Libra, reaching opposition on May 4th. Neptune and Uranus will be at opposition, and at their brightest, on Aug. 11th and Sep. 5th, respectively.

Full Moon Dates: January 14, February 12, March 14, April 13, May 13, June 11

New Moon Dates: January 29, February 27, March 29, April 27, May 27, June 25

Vernal Equinox (Start of Spring) – March 20, 2006 at 1:26p.m. EST.

Summer Solstice – June 21, 2006 at 8:26a.m. EDT.