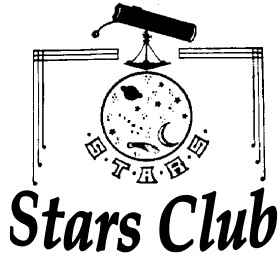


The Springfield

News from the STARS

"Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky"

SINCE 1934



January 2009



"On the Horizon"

"The Universe, yours to discover."

That's the theme for 2009, which has been designated the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) by the International Astronomical Union and the United Nations. Over the next twelve months, astronomy clubs, science museums, and planetariums around the world will aim to bring the wonders of the night sky to as many people as possible. The year 2009 marks the four hundredth anniversary of Galileo's using the telescope for astronomical observations and coincidentally continues the seventy-fifth anniversary year of the Stars Club. The time is right for us to step up our outreach activities and help educate and inspire the public about the amazing Universe we live in.

At the heart of IYA2009 are eleven "Cornerstone Projects," each with a different emphasis. One of the most important, and perhaps the best opportunity for amateurs to take part in IYA2009, is "100 Hours of Astronomy: 400 Years in the Making," to be held from April 2-5. This global marathon of public outreach aims to get as many people as possible to look through a telescope for the first time. "The Galileoscope: Millions of People Eyeing the Sky," seeks to distribute an easy-to-assemble and use telescope that matches the one Galileo had. "Dark Skies Awareness: Seeing in the Dark" aims to educate people about the effects of light pollution through star counts, as well as informing them of good lighting techniques. The "Galileo Teacher Training Program" will serve to improve science teaching in schools and involve them in astronomical discovery.

There are several opportunities for you, as a Stars Club member, to become involved with IYA2009-related activities. Our January meeting and February "Stars Over Springfield" program will feature "Telescopes 101," aimed at introducing newcomers to astronomy – who perhaps recently received a telescope as a holiday gift – to the basics of using and caring for a telescope. If you have a telescope, please bring it along to show others who can learn from your experience and expertise. Your help is also needed at our monthly "Stars Over Springfield" public observing programs, which are likely to see increased attendance thanks to IYA2009. The April "Stars Over Springfield" happens to fall on April 3rd – right in the middle of the "100 Hours of Astronomy: 400 Years in the Making" outreach marathon. As this newsletter goes to press, the Stars Club is also planning to hold a public observing program that same weekend at the Sofinowski Land Preserve in Southwick. More details about this event will be available at upcoming club meetings and on the club website.

Let's all help to make 2009 – The International Year of Astronomy – a year to remember!

- *Mike Kozicki*, Editor

Reach for the Stars

Stars Club director Amanda Jermyn has a new column she writes for the Springfield Republican. Titled "Reach for the Stars," the column will feature news about upcoming Stars Club meetings and events. The column appears in the Metro Plus section of the newspaper on the third Wednesday of each month. If you have a suggestion for an upcoming article, contact Amanda via email at astrogirl200@yahoo.com.

International Year of Astronomy



The Annual Stars Club Election

The annual Stars Club election was held at the November meeting. The 2008 club officers and directors were voted in for another term in 2009 and Jim Mell has joined the Executive Committee as a new club director. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding the Stars Club, please feel free to contact one of the club officers or directors that are listed on the last page of this newsletter.

Club Dues Increase

For the first time in many years, the Executive Committee voted to increase the annual club dues from \$20 to \$25. If you have not yet paid your dues for 2009, please do so by sending a check payable to the Springfield Stars Club to Richard Sanderson at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101. Your dues offset the costs of running the club, mostly the rental fee for the Tolman Auditorium at the Springfield Science Museum and the cost of mailings. Please help to support your club!

NOTICES

Executive Committee Meeting - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held during the 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.

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 receive 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. You can also renew your subscription online at <http://www.skyandtelescope.com>.

Telescopes Needed - Your help is needed at our "Stars Over Springfield" program. The success of this event depends upon the efforts of club members, especially those who can set up a small telescope outside the Tolman Auditorium for visitors to look through. If you have a small telescope, please consider volunteering at a "Stars Over Springfield" event this fall.

THE OBSERVING LOG

Dazzling Venus The brightest planet spends the first few months of 2009 dominating the western evening sky after sunset. It reaches greatest brilliancy on February 27th, the same night it is paired with the crescent Moon. During March Venus begins to drop lower in the west each night heading toward inferior conjunction on March 27th. On that date it passes well north of the Sun and can be seen equally well in both the morning and evening skies, very low along the horizon.

Catch a Dwarf Planet Ceres, the first and largest asteroid to be discovered, and now the smallest of the "dwarf planets" has the best opposition of our lifetimes on February 25th. On that date, it will shine at magnitude 6.9 in the constellation Leo. This opposition occurs just two weeks after Ceres reaches perihelion, its closest point to the Sun. On February 25th Ceres will pass closer to the Earth than it has since 1857 or will again until the year 4164. A detailed finder chart can be found in the March issue of *Sky & Telescope* magazine.

Saturn's Disappearing Rings If you haven't looked at Saturn in awhile, you may not recognize it. As 2009 opens, Saturn's rings will appear nearly edge-on, tipped a mere 0.8 degrees to our line of sight. They will then open up a bit more as the year progresses before being directly edge-on on September 4th. However, by that point Saturn will be too close to the Sun for observation. This is the first time Saturn's rings have narrowed since they appeared edge-on during the year 1995.

Full Moon Dates: January 10, February 9, March 10, April 9, May 9, June 7

New Moon Dates: January 26, February 24, March 26, April 24, May 24, June 22

Vernal Equinox (Start of Spring) - March 20, 2009 at 7:44a.m. EDT.

Summer Solstice - June 21, 2009 at 1:46a.m. EDT.