

The Springfield

# News from the STARS

"Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky"

SINCE 1934



July, 2006



## "On the Horizon"

With all of the exciting new astronomical discoveries being made of objects in deep space, it's easy to forget that our solar system is quite an active and interesting place in its own right. In an age when dozens of new planets are being discovered around *other stars* each year, and we're able to peer deeper into the hearts of distant galaxies than ever before, it's easy to overlook all that's happening in our own backyard. During the past several months, two events, both occurring within the confines of our solar system, have provided us with a reminder that with even a modest telescope, we can witness dramatic changes happen in space literally right before our eyes!

The first of these events occurred last February on Jupiter, as a storm roughly half the size of the more familiar Great Red Spot changed its color. Formed from the merger of two smaller storms in early 2000, it had been named the "White Oval" based on its appearance and remained quite pale until early this year. Then, it suddenly underwent a rather dramatic change, becoming red enough to match the Great Red Spot in color, as depicted in the Hubble Space Telescope images at right. In the months that followed, "Red Spot Junior," as it was dubbed, slowly drifted eastward in Jovian longitude, heading for a close "conjunction" with its larger cousin in early July, just after this newsletter goes to press. No one yet knows for certain why the White Oval has changed color, or whether or not this change is permanent or only temporary.

Then, in early May, the fragments of ill-fated Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann 3 hurtled past the Earth, providing us with a close-up view as it continued to crumble apart. Several fragments became spread out along a portion of the comet's orbit, following one after the other as they rapidly traversed our evening sky. One fragment even passed almost directly in front of M57, the Ring Nebula, on the evening of May 7<sup>th</sup>. The solar system is indeed a dynamic place full of surprises. So don't blink – or you might just miss something truly spectacular.

## *White Oval Becomes A New Red Spot*



**JUPITER'S  
RED SPOT  
"JUNIOR"**



- *Mike Kozicki*, Editor

## **Mount Greylock Star Parties**

Once again this summer, **Kevin Collins**, vice-president of the 5A's, will conduct star parties at the 3491-foot summit of Mt. Greylock in conjunction with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation and the Mt. Greylock State Reservation. Four events are scheduled in all, on July 28 & 29 and August 25 & 26. For all information, visit <http://www.amastro2.org/MtGreylock.html> on the web. Contact Kevin via email at [bippen.kcc@verizon.net](mailto:bippen.kcc@verizon.net) if you have any questions.

## **Congratulations!**

Congratulations to **Paul Cardone** for yet another great star party for the students of the Mountain View Elementary School in East Longmeadow. Despite a rainy week, skies cleared briefly on the evening of May 4<sup>th</sup> for this year's event, at which the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, and Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann 3 were observed. A special thanks goes out to all of the Stars Club members who helped out with this event!

## ***Stars Club Auction A Great Success!***

The first ever Stars Club auction, held during last February's club meeting, was a great success. The event raised a total of \$293 plus \$13 in donations. Bidding wars broke out over some items, especially a few highly coveted astronomy books. Thank you to everyone who participated. Based upon member feedback, we're considering making this an annual event. We are still undecided as to how to use the auction proceeds, as it's been suggested that they be put toward a new club telescope rather than a speaker honorarium as was previously announced. If you have any suggestions, contact a club officer or director.

## ***The Stars Club Website***

This past April, the club website, <http://www.reflector.org>, was temporarily out of service for several days due to a change in web hosts. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. While most of the site is functional again, some parts will require modifications, prompting consideration of a possible site redesign in the near future. This fall, the Stars Club website will be celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

## **NOTICES**

**Executive Committee Meeting** - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held in late fall. 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 October 31.

**Correction** - In the January 2006 edition of the Stars Club Newsletter, the date for last March's Stars Over Springfield program was incorrectly given as "Friday, March 2." It should have read, "Friday, March 3." We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused for either club members or the general public.

**Membership Dues** - Club dues for 2007 will remain at \$20. Please send a check for \$20, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101 by December 31, 2006. Your dues offset costs of running the club, mostly the museum room rental fee and mailings. PLEASE help to support your club!

**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'll 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.

**Speakers Wanted** - Do you have a suggestion for a speaker or an idea for a meeting you'd like to see at the Stars Club? If so, contact one of the club officers or directors. Or, volunteer to give a talk yourself.

**Telescopes Needed** - The success of "Stars Over Springfield" 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 an upcoming event this fall.

## **THE OBSERVING LOG**

***Where Are All the Planets?*** In recent years, we've been spoiled by frequent multiple-planet conjunctions conveniently placed in the early-evening sky. This fall, we'll be making up for that. Once Jupiter begins to fade in the glow of sunset during October, the early-evening sky will be devoid of bright planets for many months until Saturn appears next winter. In the meantime, use the opportunity to check out some minor planets! 1 Ceres and 6 Hebe reach opposition during August not far from M30 in Capricornus, while 7 Iris will be at magnitude 6.8, its brightest in 70 years, when it reaches opposition on November 13<sup>th</sup> near the Pleiades.

***More Low Moons*** Extreme lunar declinations continue this year. Pay special attention to October's waxing crescent, which may not become visible until several days after new moon on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. At some latitudes, the waxing crescent's far southerly declination in the first days after new moon will cause it to set before the Sun!

***Full Moon Dates:*** July 10, August 9, September 7, October 6, November 5, December 4

***New Moon Dates:*** July 25, August 23, September 22, October 22, November 20, December 20

***Autumnal Equinox*** (Start of Fall) - September 23, 2006 at 12:03a.m. EDT.

***Winter Solstice*** - December 21, 2006 at 7:22p.m. EST.