



## NCRAL 2018 - Door Peninsula Astronomical Society



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# NCRAL Chair's Message

In early October, NCRAL Vice Chair John Attewell wrote me an email about some things that, coincidentally, I had also been thinking about. We agreed to talk over the phone about these topics and subsequently spent about an hour doing so on October 15<sup>th</sup>. John later summarized what we had been discussing because I was almost literally on the way out my door for a two-week trip to Europe. What John wrote was as follows:

*We both agreed that there needs to be a major revision of the regional by-laws. We need to seriously review them. One of the changes discussed was allowing officers to serve more than two terms (with the exception of the Treasurer). We need to find out how much flexibility the national office (ALCOR) will allow in changing these rules.*

*We also talked about getting teleconferencing software to help with periodic "Presidents" meetings.*

*There was a conversation about sharing newsletter content to keep abreast of other club's activities and give some kind of cohesiveness to the region. We also endorsed the idea that we should have informal meetings just to talk about things of common interest.*

*A common web resource for clubs was discussed. We need suggestions on how to manage a website and hosting resources. John mentioned he had used web publishing software from Adobe called "Contribute" that was very powerful and easy to use (though no longer being supported, editor). We should put a committee together to discuss these things.*

*We need feedback from the club Presidents. Carl said he could put a survey together using Survey Monkey.*

*We talked about region-wide recruiting materials. Specifically, information for individuals who express an interest but need basic information about the hobby of astronomy. Carl pointed out that he has already created this kind of information and has it posted on the Twin City Amateur Astronomers' website. These are beautiful, well written, guides that should be foremost at any outreach event.*

Now, allow me to provide some commentary for each of these points that John so concisely stated:

**NCRAL BYLAW REVISIONS:** In both of our opinions, the Region's bylaws are to some extent unworkable the way they are written. I made this point in the Summer and Autumn 2017 issues of **Northern Lights**. The NCRAL Advisory Council – consisting of club presidents and one additional representative from each AL-affiliated club – needs to be invested with greater advisory power and perhaps even a vote. In a day when we have nearly instantaneous telecommunications there is absolutely no reason why we have to wait for annual meetings for the role of these leaders to be played out. This would also allow us to remove the duplicate and seemingly needless meeting that occurs at each Regional business meeting to the consternation of some and the confusion of many. This leads to the next point.

**TELECONFERENCING:** It would be ideal if we could use some of the fiscal resources of the Region to purchase teleconferencing software. This software would allow for "town hall" meetings of the Executive Council with the Advisory Council on a periodic or as-needed basis. Proposals could be considered and decisions made without having to wait for annual meetings. With the current state of affairs, it can take years to make significant changes in the way that the Region operates. We need to be responsive to the needs of the membership and proactive in pushing amateur astronomy. To invest such power to this broader group outside of Regional meetings would, of course, require an amendment to the NCRAL Bylaws which can be reviewed at the following URL: <https://ncral.wordpress.com/bylaws/>

**SHARING NEWSLETTERS:** I recently have been receiving newsletters from several of the Region's clubs. Frankly, I find reading these newsletters a good way to keep a finger on the pulse of the region. It would be nice to have some sort of common repository for current and/or recent issues of newsletters made available for access by NCRAL affiliates. This certainly could be a web-based resource which leads to John's next suggestion.

**COMMON WEB RESOURCES:** As John mentioned in his note, it would be great if we were to share common resources. Resources might include web page templates and guides to amateur astronomy. He pointed out that the Twin City Amateur Astronomers (Bloomington-Normal, IL) already has a number of such guides that might serve as a common core for all clubs. (See <http://tcaa.us/TCAAGuides.aspx> for seven such examples.) John further suggested that it would be great to have a guide for running a club successfully – recruiting and retaining new members, programming activities, education and public service guidance, meeting and conference hosting, how to develop proactive (rather than merely reactive) leadership, what it takes to produce a good newsletter, conducting club and public events, maintaining websites and list serves, relationships with other clubs, awards programs, and so forth. I completely agree that it would be terrific to assemble a guide that showcases various successful clubs as well as their resources and activities.

**CLUB FEEDBACK:** The need for communication within the affiliates of the region is large, but in this day and age of rapid communication it should not prove to be a problem. As I mentioned in my first Chair's message appearing in the Summer 2017 issue of **Northern Lights**, I feel that the leadership needs to conduct a periodic assessment of affiliates' needs and interests. It is my intention to solicit input using an online survey; you can find more about this in an article further along in this issue of the newsletter. Please do participate in this survey if you care at all about the Region and your club's participation in its activities.

**RECRUITING MATERIALS:** John mentioned recruiting materials which are important, but we must not neglect the other part of the equation – retention of members. Club membership is like a leaky bucket. While new members might come into the bucket like raindrops, the level of the bucket will never rise if it continues to leak. Recruitment and retention of members is something this is perhaps most clearly needed among possible new guides to amateur astronomy – especially in light of the "graying" of our hobby and many of our clubs.

So, these are just a few of the things that NCRAL might develop and disseminate to improve our offerings and increase the number of affiliates associated with our region.

Look forward to learning more about these topics later in this and future issues of **Northern Lights**, and affiliated club leaders – presidents, ALCors, and editors – keep your eyes on your email for direct communications regarding all these matters for dissemination to your memberships.

As always, I'm asking clubs to keep me updated with the names and email addresses of presidents, ALCors, and newsletter editor. There are many changes in club leadership during this time of year, so updates are essential if your club expects to be kept informed about events within NCRAL. My contact information is below.

Have a happy and productive New Year in 2018!

Carl J. Wenning  
NCRAL Chair (2017-2019)  
[carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com)  
Cell: (309) 830-4085

## NORTHERN LIGHTS EDITOR'S MESSAGE

There is excitement about the discussed improvements to increase the communications between the members in general of the NCRAL and AL. In addition to the continued presence in social media, the proposed expansion of outreach outlined in the NCRAL Chair's Message (page 2) and the "Notes from the Astronomical League Council Meeting" (page 8) give you an idea. In the same token, I continue to encourage the members of the NCRAL in general to become more involve with their respective clubs as well as the NCRAL. Some of that involvement can be in the form of contributing articles related to astronomy, astroimaging, observing, etc. Last year (2017) we had some excellent articles and I hope you will keep them coming in 2018. Also, send your star parties pictures, meeting and astroimages to be showcased in the Photo Gallery (page 13), we will do our best to include them all.

I also encourage you to start thinking about making plans to attend the NCRAL 2018 Annual Convention hosted by the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society at the Lodge at Leathem Smith in Sturgeon Bay, WI on May 4 and 5 (see pages 5 and 6) or go to the event Web site at <https://www.doorastronomy.org/ncral-2018>. Also on July 11 to 14 is ALCON 2018 hosted by the Minnesota Astronomical Society, the event location will be the Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport Mall of America, 3800 American Blvd. E, 55425 Bloomington, MN (page 7) or visit <https://www.astroleague.org/content/alcon-2018>. If your local club has events that you would like to be announced in the **Northern Lights** please send the information about the event to the NCRAL Chair Carl Wenning ([carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com)) or myself (see below), make sure to include the location, dates, point of contact, if there is an admittance fee and if there is a web site for this event.

Last year we profiled of some of the regional members and we would like to continue to do so this year, if you have someone that has demonstrated commitment in service and dedication to your club or Astronomy in general please write a page or so and include the member's picture and we will include it in the next edition of the **Northern Lights**, if there are multiple submissions we will attempt to include them all otherwise we will do it in the next publication.

This year, 2018, will continue to be full of important astronomical events such the most anticipated launch of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) schedule to be launched on October 2018, but during this winter season we will experience in January two Full Moon Supermoon, Jan 1/31 and also a Total Lunar Eclipse on Jan 31 (<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/LEplot/LEplot2001/LE2018Jan31T.pdf>), a partial Solar Eclipse on Feb 15 although not visible in NA (<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEplot/SEplot2001/SE2018Feb15P.GIF>), and the regular meteor showers. I wish you have a productive 2018 and have time to enjoy the wonders of the night sky.

Clear skies,

Jim Gibbs, Editor-in-Chief  
(Twin City Amateur Astronomers)  
[jrgibbs@msn.com](mailto:jrgibbs@msn.com)

### AL-AFFILIATED CLUBS CAN NOW DIRECTLY UPDATE THEIR INFORMATION ON THE AL WEBSITE!

Did you know that the president, treasurer, or ALCor of your club may update information about your club yourself by requesting an account at URL [https://members.astroleague.org/request\\_account](https://members.astroleague.org/request_account) and entering their email address and then pressing the "Request account information" button near the bottom of the page? An email with instructions and a link to create a new account will then be sent within a few minutes. Once logged in, there are instructions at <https://members.astroleague.org/content/club-officer-tutorial> on how to update your club's info.

### NCRAL ON FACEBOOK

Did you know that NCRAL now has a Facebook page for sharing information about your Region's AL-affiliated clubs? This is a great way share observations, notes, images, and any other things you think the NCRAL membership or AL members-at-large living in our region would enjoy. Check us out at:

<https://www.facebook.com/northcentralregionastronomicalleague/>

Lastly, would you like to see your images on the NCRAL Facebook page banner? If so, send your image and a 2-3 sentence caption to the **NORTHERN LIGHTS** newsletter assistant editor at [carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com).



# REGIONAL OFFICER & LEADER CONTACT INFORMATION

**NCRAL Chair:** Carl Wenning (2-year term expires spring 2019)

**Bio:** Carl has been an amateur astronomer since being introduced to the sky by his grandfather during July 1957. Today he is a 38-year member of the Twin City Astronomers of Bloomington-Normal, IL. He is an AL Master observer who makes frequent use of his CPC 11" telescope. He is a former planetarium director and physics teacher educator who remains actively involved in astronomy education and public outreach events.

**Contact:** [carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com)



**Vice Chair:** John Attewell (2-year term expires spring 2019)

**Bio:** John is a statistical analyst by day and amateur astronomer by night. He is particularly interested in the history of astronomy especially how early astronomers used mathematics to explain their observations. John is a member of the Rochester Astronomy Club (Minnesota, not New York) and was the planning chairman for the 2017 NCRAL conference held at the Eagle Bluff campus near Lanesboro, MN.

**Contact:** [john\\_attewell@hotmail.com](mailto:john_attewell@hotmail.com)



**Secretary-Treasurer:** Donald Klemt (2-year term expires spring 2018)

**Bio:** Don has been in the Racine Astronomical Society for the past 30 years. His interest in astronomy started when his dad took him to Dearborn Observatory (Northwestern University) when he was about 10. He has been active in public outreach for all 30 years in the RAS. His scopes include a 20", 11", 10", and a 90mm solar scope. He has served as Secretary-Treasurer of the NCRAL for the past 11 years. Don is retired from the Chicago Board of Trade where he was a member for almost 40 years.

**Contact:** [donklemt@ameritech.net](mailto:donklemt@ameritech.net)



**Representative:** Bill Davidson (completing vacant 3-year term that expires spring 2019)

**Bio:** In the days of the Apollo missions, Bill first observed the moon (and sunspots!) with a 50x, 60mm JC Penny's refractor telescope. Not discouraged, 40 years later, he built and observes with a 6.25-inch achromatic doublet objective, f/10, 1600 mm focal length refracting telescope. He recently retired as a college mathematics instructor, has been a member of the Rochester Astronomy Club for 20 years, and serves as editor of the club's newsletter *RochesterSkies*.

**Contact:** [rochesterskies@outlook.com](mailto:rochesterskies@outlook.com)



**NCRAL Webmaster:** Jeff Setzer (appointed)

**Bio:** Jeff has been an amateur astronomer since 1984, and has been part of the Northern Cross Science Foundation since that time. He is a longtime member of their Board of Directors, has held several office positions, and is currently their President. He has completed several Astronomical League observing programs, made his own telescopes and optics, and is a self-described telescope nut. You will often find him at star parties with his 22" Starmaster and TeleVue 85 telescopes.

**Contact:** [astrosetz@hotmail.com](mailto:astrosetz@hotmail.com)



**NORTHERN LIGHTS Editor-in-Chief:** Jim Gibbs (appointed)

**Bio:** Jim has been observing the starry skies since he was 10 years old. His primary affiliation is with the Twin City Amateur Astronomers where he has been a member for 4 years. He is an avid amateur astronomer who enjoys observing and especially imaging around the TCAA dark sites and travelling around finding other dark sites. He is a software engineer and currently is concentrating in growing his small consulting business.

**Contact:** [jrgibbs@msn.com](mailto:jrgibbs@msn.com)



# NCRAL 2018

Dark Skies for Bright Stars

Following this theme, speakers are scheduled, the venue set, and a very interesting NCRAL 2018 is expected. Registration will open January 1, 2018. Located in Door County Wisconsin, which offers dark sky and beautiful natural surroundings, Door Peninsula Astronomical Society (DPAS) will host the meeting at the Lodge at Leathem Smith in Sturgeon Bay, WI. We will be celebrating the recent designation of nearby Newport State Park as an International Dark Sky Site, the first in Wisconsin and only the 13<sup>th</sup> in the entire United States. Anyone wishing to visit the site can bring viewing equipment or visit this beautiful park the day before or after the meeting.



On Friday evening members of DPAS will open our observatory and Astronomy Center for viewing and tours of the facilities. During the day on Saturday we will be having an astronomy photo contest and astronomy related poetry

contest. Bring any number of your own photos printed any size and original poems for voting by all participants.

The list of speakers follows and the subjects will prove to be on very timely topics.

A block of rooms with special rates has been set aside. Contact information is on the registration form. Payment for the meeting registration can be made by check to DPAS or through PayPal on our website, <https://www.doorastronomy.org/ncral-2018> after the first of the year. Questions can be directed to

[Treasurer@doorastronomy.org](mailto:Treasurer@doorastronomy.org).

Members of DPAS cordially invite you and your guests to join us here in beautiful Door County, Wisconsin for an informative and relaxing weekend with fellow amateur astronomers.

## NCRAL 2018 Speakers

**Kevin Poe** is the Green Energy Project Manager at the National Park Service at Bryce Canyon, Utah. He is a second-generation Park Ranger and owner of Dark Ranger Telescope Tours. Kevin calls himself the Dark Ranger to make environmental advocacy cool and heroic, and describes himself as a Planet Hugger. Teaching awareness of light pollution and understanding of the universe to people of all ages through lectures and stories is his goal.

**Kate Meredith** is the Education Director at the University of Chicago Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay, WI. She is currently working on a program for students with low vision and blindness to develop image processing software. The three-year project, Innovators Developing Accessible Tools for Astronomy (IDATA) is funded by the National Science Foundation. She will explore what else we can do with invisible data that will allow everyone access to the same quality and quantity of information.

**Audrey Fischer** works through her organization, One Star at a Time, to create star parks in Chicago and around the world. Star parks are designated areas where the lights are off or directed downward. As a Chicago native, she knows that it isn't a perfect place for stargazing, but she is working to return stars back into all cities. Audrey stated during an interview for the Chicago Tribune "Starlight belongs to each and every person in the world. A starry night gives people a reason to look up and to realize that others from around the globe



share the same sky. Starlight is the path to closer understanding of our universe, each other, and ourselves – and maybe it's even a path toward peace."

**Beth Bartoli** is the Naturalist at Newport State Park in Door County, our recently designated Dark Sky Site. The designation was awarded after years of work by her, the staff of the park and our Door Peninsula Astronomical Society. She helps conduct astronomy programs at the park and states "We never tire of seeing that 'aha' moment on the upturned faces of our visitors as they gaze toward the heavens". The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Newport State Park are committed to protect our dark sky through lighting projects, community education and outreach.

**Tyler Linder** is a professional astronomer supported by NASA's Near Earth Object Observations (NEOO) research grants to track and study the Near-Earth Asteroid (NEA) population. His presentation will focus on the information that can be obtained by asteroid characterization, both through light curve analysis as well as visible and near-infrared spectroscopy. The collaboration between amateur and professional astronomers uses middle and high school students as well as undergraduate students.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF THE ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE  
ANNUAL CONVENTION

Hosted by Door Peninsula Astronomical Society  
MAY 4-5, 2018 at The Lodge at Leathem-Smith

REGISTRATION FORM

<https://www.doorastronomy.org/>



Please complete and return the following form for each convention attendee

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_

Club/Society Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Included in Registration:

Admittance to all talks and activities

Friday evening heavy Hors d'Oeuvres

Saturday lunch and banquet dinner

Registered by March 31, 2018 ..... \$165

Registered after March 31, 2018 ..... \$185 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Friday night Heavy Hors d'Oeuvres, Saturday Lunch and the Banquet included for attendees. Additional meals for non-attendees:

	Quantity	
Friday night Heavy Hors d'Oeuvres	_____ @ \$20	\$ _____
Saturday Lunch	_____ @ \$20	\$ _____
Saturday Night Banquet	_____ @ \$30	\$ _____

*Note: There is a complimentary breakfast for those staying at The Lodge at Leathem-Smith. For others the cost of breakfast is \$10 plus tax and gratuity payable to The Lodge at Leathem-Smith.*

Event shirt -- (short sleeve, long sleeve) (S, M, L, XL, XXL) Circle choices \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$20 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Event photo -- cost includes shipping \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$20 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Due** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment can be check payable to:

Door Peninsula Astronomical Society  
ATTN: NCRAL Convention Registration  
PO Box 331  
Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235

or pay by PayPal at

<https://www.doorastronomy.org/ncral-2018>

A block of 30 rooms at special rates will be held until March 15, 2018 at the Lodge at Leathem-Smith. After that date rates will revert to the standard seasonal rates. You **MUST** make your reservations by phone and mention NCRAL to get the special rate. **(920)743-5555**

Standard Rooms (1 King/2 Queens) - \$89/night + tax  
Captain Suites (1 Queen & sofa sleeper) - \$129/night + tax  
Complimentary breakfast is included.

Directions to The Lodge at Leathem-Smith, 1640 Memorial Drive, Sturgeon Bay, WI, Phone: (920)743-5555

From Highway 42/57: North bound -- Left on Utah St (First exit after the bridge) then left on S 18<sup>th</sup> Ave.

South bound -- Right on Utah St (First turn after the Michigan St. Round-About), then left on S 18<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Destination will be on the right.

**Cancellations/Refund**

Requests for cancellations must be received in writing or by email ([Treasurer@doorastronomy.org](mailto:Treasurer@doorastronomy.org)) by April 15, 2018, for a full refund less a \$10.00 processing charge. Persons who do not appear at the event cancel by default and are not eligible for any refunds. Refunds will take approximately two to three weeks.



# FUTURE NCRAL REGIONAL MEETINGS

Each year at our Region's annual meeting, the NCRAL leadership solicits hosts for upcoming meetings. The following affiliates have either agreed to or are considering hosting future meetings. We are still in need for hosts, but especially for 2022.

2018 Door Peninsula Astronomical Society (May 4-5)

2019 Popular Astronomy Club (tentative)

2020 Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society (tentative)

2021 Neville Public Museum Astronomical Society (tentative)

2022 OPEN

2023 Twin City Amateur Astronomers (confirmed)

If your club has never hosted an NCRAL Region meeting, please consider doing so. While it is a considerable amount of work, it can be quite rewarding – even fun. It provides an opportunity to showcase your group's facilities and accomplishments, build club camaraderie, and to get to personally know interesting guest speakers. You can also use such an event to grow your club's membership.

Resources are available to help plan and execute the meeting, not the least of which is the Astronomical League's Planning Guide that be used for general guidelines. <https://www.astroleague.org/al/soc aids/convplan/conplidx.html> Experienced Region members also can provide lots of guidance and assistance.

Please contact NCRAL Chair Carl Wenning at [carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com) should you have any questions or wish to toss your hat into the ring.

## ALCON 2018 COMING JULY 11-14



Gleaned from *GEMINI*, a publication of the Minnesota Astronomical Society.

The Minnesota Astronomical Society (MAS) will be hosting the Astronomical League National Convention in 2018. The dates of ALCON 2018 are July 11-14. The convention will be held at the Hilton Minneapolis/St Paul Airport Mall of America near I-494 and 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. They will have field trips to Eagle Lake Observatory and other attractions in the Twin Cities, such as the Bell Museum, the Science Museum of Minnesota, and the Mall of America. They will host a “star-b-q” at Eagle Lake Observatory (ELO) in Baylor Regional Park.

The theme of the convention will be *Outreach*. This will be a wonderful opportunity to show the world how MAS does astronomy in the Upper Midwest. We will also be able to showcase our world-class facility at ELO. They might have a couple of talks at the observatory and nightly observing. Several planets will be visible, including Jupiter and Saturn. Mars will be within a couple of weeks of its very favorable opposition.

According to MAS member Bob Kerr, “A brief video was shot on location at our club's well-equipped Eagle Lake Observatory, where we'll hold nightly star parties during ALCon 2018. Co-Chair Dave Falkner tells you about some of the events and activities already planned, as well as several of the featured guest speakers. You'll also enjoy his tour showing the great equipment and facilities available to you at our observatory site.” You may view the video here; please note that the URL is case sensitive:

<https://goo.gl/hc845m>

Bob continues, “We're excited for the opportunity to host this popular event and hope you and your family will join us next summer. And watch for video updates in the months to come. Thanks and Clear skies!”

Make certain that you make your plans now.

# NOTES FROM THE ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 15<sup>TH</sup> IN CASPER, WY

Most of the meeting consisted of discussion around a number of motions brought to the Council. Here is a summary of those motions and the results.

1. A motion was made that the council approve exploring the possibility of expanding the Reflector to include a monthly or more frequent digital supplement. This would provide more timely communication to members about events and recent developments in the astronomical community. The motion was approved.
2. A motion was approved that the council explore developing an AL App to communicate the League's message to the public and link to League offerings.
3. A motion to affirm the recently developed laser policy as official AL policy was approved.
4. There was discussion concerning the protection of the AL trademark, copyright, patent and other intellectual property. A motion was made and approved authorizing the executive committee to act.
5. A motion was approved to form an ad hoc committee to investigate the future potential avenues for the AL online store and report back to the AL executive committee by October 1, 2017.
6. A motion was approved to move/expand to a weekly/monthly e-newsletter distribution for AL members.
7. A motion was made that dues from clubs be payable on July 1st and include updated rosters. If not received by October 15th then the club will be removed from the AL roster immediately. Clubs asking to rejoin within 2-years of removal shall bring past due balances up-to-date along with new club dues. After 2-years, clubs can reapply as a new club without penalty. This motion was passed.

Other topics that were discussed during the meeting included:

- The AL will be promoting itself to current League clubs and non-League clubs.
- The Minnesota Astronomical Society gave an update on its preparations for ALCON 2018 to be held in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. The Board was pleased with the progress to date.
- The AL will be working on webstore security, which must be done by February.
- Provisionally approved the Mars Observing Program. A complete program must be presented before going ahead with it.
- A Master Observer Binocular Program was approved.

End of Meeting Notes

Respectfully submitted,  
Dave Falkner, Minnesota Astronomical Society  
(Substituting for NCRAL ALCor Bill Davidson)

## NCRAL MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

by Carl Wenning, NCRAL Chair

As I mentioned in my first Chair's Message this past summer, "I want to conduct one or more surveys to get a sense of what Region members like, want, and will agree to. As a Region, we should look to fulfill the wants and needs of our members and those whom we serve." With this issue of **NORTHERN LIGHTS**, I'm attempting to do just that.

I have been in consultation with Vice Chair John Attewell about creating such my first membership survey, and I have – with his sage advice – assembled what I feel is a survey that will help set the direction for NCRAL leadership in the years to come. Therefore, member participation is essential – every member.

Input from those who have long participated in NCRAL activities is just as important as those who have never participated. If you have not participated, we'd like to know how to improve NCRAL offerings so that you feel more inclined to participate. If you have been participating for years, we want to know what it is that keeps you coming to our activities.

This anonymous survey (state and club affiliations are requested) has 17 questions that seek membership advice about to improve NCRAL's direction and offerings. We address five themes: (1) you club's affiliation with the Astronomical League, (2) personal benefits of being affiliated with the Astronomical League, (3) Expectations of NCRAL leadership, (4) NCRAL communications, and (5) desirable NCRAL activities. The survey is mostly fixed response, so it should take no more than about 5-10 minutes to complete.

The survey may be accessed online at the following short URL (please note that the URL is case sensitive):

<https://goo.gl/oDzhs9>

If the future and offerings of NCRAL are important to you, then be sure to complete the survey no later than January 31<sup>st</sup>. Survey results will appear in the Spring 2018 issue of the **NORTHERN LIGHTS** newsletter. No identifying information will be included in the report. Thank you in advance for participating; it will help to make a difference.



# THE RESULTS ARE IN:

## INVOLVEMENT WITH YOUR ASTRONOMY CLUB

by Carl J. Wenning, Twin City Amateur Astronomers

**Editor's note:** This article is a slightly revised version of an article by the same name appearing in the July 2015 issue of *The OBSERVER* – the newsletter of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers. Though the results are from a survey among Illinois astronomy clubs, the results are probably typical of the Region.

Last month I wrote an article about the importance of astronomy clubs, and expressed my concern that many dues-paying members are not involved to a great extent in the club. As I indicated in that article, this has been an ongoing concern of mine as well as of others in leadership positions. During the first two weeks of June (2015) I conducted an anonymous online survey among Illinois astronomy clubs attempting to determine the degree of and reasons for member involvement with these groups.

The present article addresses the results from all 58 individuals from different clubs who participated in the survey through June 15th. The results should be interpreted as being “in general” and not necessarily specific to any one group. There were 38 questions organized into eight groupings. The first group of questions dealt with demographics of those participating in the survey. Here were the results in bullet form:

- About 80% of respondents belong to only their local astronomy club, and about 20% belong to more than one club.
- About 85% of the respondents were male, 7% were female, 8% chose not to answer this question.
- About 65% of respondents work full or part time; 30% are non-working retirees, and 5% are students.
- More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents hold individual memberships whereas just under  $\frac{1}{4}$  are members along with a spouse and/or child(ren).
- The largest number of respondents came from members who were associated with their clubs 3-5 years and 11-20 years (about 25% each). Other periods (20 years) were about equally represented at about  $\frac{1}{6}$  (13%) of their age group each.
- Just over  $\frac{1}{2}$  of respondents owned a telescope as a youth, and just less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  were not involved with amateur astronomy at all as a youth.
- Some 31% attended astronomy club meetings and events as youths; 26% were active amateur astronomers as youths. When asked to what extent they have participated in club activities during the past year, the following degrees (number and percentage of respondents) were noted:
  - I attended no club events 5 8.6%
  - I attended 10-25% of club events 5 8.6%
  - I attended 25-50% of club events 9 15.5%
  - I attended 50-75% of club events 9 15.5%
  - I attended more than 75% of club events 17 29.3%

- I attended 10% or less of club events 13 22.4%
- I attended 10-25% of club events 5 8.6%
- I attended 25-50% of club events 9 15.5%
- I attended 50-75% of club events 9 15.5%
- I attended more than 75% of club events 17 29.3%

The next group of questions examined the primary reasons for joining the club. There was a myriad of such reasons suggested. The survey showed that about 60% joined their club both “to learn about astronomy” and/or “develop friendships with likeminded people.” About 50% indicated both “to gain access to club observatory/telescopes” and/or “to attend private club events.” Other key reasons included getting assistance with observing or telescopes, and participating in education/public outreach activities.

When asked how people first heard about their local astronomy clubs, the reason was overwhelmingly “through a friend or acquaintance (86%). Distant seconds were “through a club website” (33%), and attendance at a public club event (24%).

The next group of questions asked about “desirable club activities”, the answers solicited were mostly free response. The first question asked about the greatest benefit to belonging to the club. Key responses were interactions with other likeminded individuals, observing locations and equipment, and sharing knowledge/learning from others.

When asked in which club activities they most frequently participate in, the responses were meetings, public observing sessions, and education/public outreach. These answers were almost predictable, because club members attend what clubs offer.

When asked about which types of activities they would like to see more, there were clear winners: “social events like pizza parties, informal dinners, member observing sessions, etc.” (41%), “learn how to use club’s observatory” (33%), “more advanced astronomy talks” (26%), and “in town observing sessions by day and by night” (24%).

The next group of questions dealt with participation in their local astronomy clubs. When asked why they don’t attend more functions than they do, the main response is that they are too busy with other activities (39%) most likely consisting of family or other social obligations (36%). Fortunately, only in 9% of the cases did respondents indicate that “personality conflicts” kept them from regular involvement in club functions. By far, 70% said that the best day for participating in club functions are on Saturdays. The locations of these events generated no unexpected trends.

The next group of questions dealt with becoming more involved in one’s local astronomy club. Nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  (66%) indicated a desire to be more engaged in the activities of their clubs. When asked what it would take to get other members more involved in the current activities of their club, a whole gamut of responses was given showing no “silver bullet” for increasing this type of participation. Main ideas listed were “other” (39%), “more sky viewing sessions for members” (33%), “more social events so we can get to know one another” (29%), and “friendship/camaraderie” (27%). To clarify the meaning of “other”, we fortunately asked for an explanation using a free response format that generally indicated a desire for “more advanced” activities such as technical speakers, observing challenges, and less emphasis on astrophotography.

The next group of questions asked about what it would take to get others more involved, and there were some interesting responses. Comments included statements like more training sessions, better publicity, offer more social events, more members-only observing sessions, more basic talks, more actively engaging new members, and even having an events coordinator who would be responsible for organizing special activities regarding observation, socialization, and education. When focused on the question of increasing membership, there was a similarly long list of suggestions: increase astronomy content and decrease business content at meetings, use social media better, hold observing sessions in city parks, offer more child-friendly activities, arrange for better distribution of brochures, offer club-made educational resources for schools, and create club regalia.

Communications within the club constituted the next group of questions. The main avenues of communication are newsletters (93%), websites (85%), email lists (82%), and social media (42%). Blogs, online forums, and phone lists were hardly mentioned at all. 100% expressed interest in their club’s communication media. 100% are interested in their club’s newsletter (when they club published one – not all do); 58% were interested in their club’s social media; 92% were interested in their club’s website; and 93% were interested in their club’s use of an email listserv.

By far the clubs’ most effective outreach to members was through club emails (88% read them immediately upon receipt) and newsletters (77% read it immediately upon receipt). Other methods of communication such as social media (33% read it immediately) barely showed much response – likely perhaps because online forums, blogs, and phone lists are not used much.

One of the biggest aspects of communication within a club has to do with face-to-face communication. Here 83% said they were made to feel welcome when they first joined their

clubs; 12% said they were not. When asked how we could best make new members welcome, the following suggestions in general were made: new member events, link new members with established mentors, create a welcome package, recognize them at the beginning of meetings, offer activities for beginners, have new members meet and greet the officers, place more emphasis on introductory visual observing, and assist new members with their observing equipment.

The next group of questions dealt with retaining a member of their club. When asked about staying with their primary astronomy club, 90% said they would; 91% said they would recommend their astronomy clubs to others. 76% expressed satisfaction with the club's observing location, and 68% with the club's equipment. 97% were satisfied with the amount they have to pay for dues. Only 52% are satisfied, however, with the amount of time and effort that they see most other members contribute to their club.

The concluding group of questions asked how to improve club involvement touching upon anything that this survey might have missed. The suggestions drew attention to the fact that more involved members wished that others would become more so. The main suggestion was to more heavily promote the use of social media, improve newsletter content by obtaining articles written by club members, raise the intellectual standards of talks intended for experienced amateurs, and several more – often club specific.

Lessons learned in general... Only about 1/3 of each club's assumed 40 members completed the survey, and of these about half were less active – participating in less than half of all club functions – the very type of individual we most hoped would participate in the survey. Only about 1/6 of each club's less active members completed the survey. I cannot but conclude that these members who did not participate in the survey joined their club to support its efforts with their dues and might never be more actively engaged – no matter what changes take place within their club. Despite this, these individuals should know their support is greatly appreciated. Those who are engaged at one time or another with their local club have done so as a result of a personal invitation.

Websites, social media, advertising, and even adult education courses are far less effective in promoting club membership, though emails and newsletters play an important role. People who join our clubs do so initially to learn about astronomy, and share it with likeminded people

ple hopefully using club materials. Having participated in amateur astronomy as a youth was not a prerequisite for adult membership; only 1/2 of those currently involved in an astronomy club were active as observers in their youth. Several other main appeals of an astronomy club are access to telescopes and observatories, and outreach activities. Keep in mind that many prospective members are overwhelmed by the cost of large "goto" telescopes and photographic equipment. If these are perceived as prerequisites for joining a club, few will be the number of new members.

If these are seen as benefits of membership, then clubs who provide access to their members stand to benefit. Emphasis should be placed from time to time on simple equipment and approaches. Clubs might even want to consider purchasing high quality, readily portable "goto" telescopes in the 8-inch aperture range. Once members have mastered these, then and only then will they be prepared to take the steps necessary to become advanced amateur astronomers.

Clubs might be able to increase both their appeal and participation if they offer events geared toward the whole family from time to time. Of course, this does not preclude the inclusion of "advanced topics" every once in a while. One cautionary note, however, is not to invite the general public to events intended for the more experienced amateur astronomer. Talks that include elements of spherical astronomy, calculus, or complicated image processing procedures for instance could overwhelm novices and easily drive them away never to return.

Members want to be more involved with their club and others to be so too. Many members would like to have more club events including aspects of observation, education, and socialization. Clubs can do this by hosting observing events on Saturdays that include the whole family, providing classes for members, and hosting more social activities such as dinners and club meetings (where they do not exist already).

At the same time club leadership must look to provide services for solitary or advanced members as well. A wider range of experienced members needs to be on the lookout to welcome and assist new members. Clubs should make a point of providing outreach to those who are unfamiliar with the night sky – a growing portion of our population. Efforts should be made to increasingly use social media and get the word out through other means in places where families gather such as in community parks, libraries, and community events. Daytime and nighttime "sidewalk"

astronomy would also be another means to attract those with only a "passing" interest – literally. Extending personal invitations and handing out flyers at such time would be most appropriate.

While offering never-done-before activities in response to the findings of this survey, leaders need to keep in mind that the events have to be carefully coordinated with would-be attendees. You will recall from the survey that many members don't participate as much as they'd like because they have schedule conflicts. I also have learned over the years that people will often suggest lots of great ideas; the problem with this is that when asked if they would participate in them either as teachers or students the response is more often than not "crickets". We must ensure commitment from both ends of the expertise spectrum.

Electronic communications within the club are key to involving current members. Among the most important are email lists, newsletters, and social media. Websites need to be constantly improved and refreshed if they are to attract "repeat" visitors. Communications sent directly to the membership are generally read and responded to in relatively short order due to their brevity. Newsletters, being longer, are often put off for reading later due to their requirement for additional time.

Not to be understated, however, is the value of direct interpersonal communications. While promotion of our astronomy clubs through personal contact is critical to building a membership, it's the face-to-face contact, helpful encouragement, and deepening friendships that keeps members in a club. Because so many schedule conflicts exist, it is important to get information out about events early, and to send reminders regularly. The appeal of an event must be clearly stated and of great interest if people are going to put it into their social calendar. Remember, the astronomy club isn't the only game in town; it has to compete with other events. This can be when we realize that we often conduct our activities in remote locations. These might well attract only the more dedicated among our memberships.

Members who are involved in their clubs tend to continue their memberships when they clearly perceive the benefits. The fact that our clubs have roughly equal number in the various age groups suggests that the current membership numbers are relatively stable. So, if members are satisfied with the status quo, then things need not change. If, however, members want their clubs and hobbies to grow, they must change what they are doing.

## NCRAL WEBSITE

by Jeff Setzer

Did you know that NCRAL has its own website? It's true! Point your browser to [ncral.wordpress.com](http://ncral.wordpress.com) and you'll see a central repository for information about our Region and constituent clubs.

As Webmaster, I maintain the information on the website, but the original idea was — and still is — to publish contributions from members. As part of that mission, we will be hosting the emailed newsletters at the website, so people can easily access back issues.

Will the website progress from an occasionally used reference to something more? That's entirely up to you, dear reader. If you have ideas or submissions, contact me at [astrosetz@hotmail.com](mailto:astrosetz@hotmail.com)





## ASTROBITS – NEWS ITEMS FROM AROUND THE REGION

**Editor's note:** *AstroBits are gleaned from the newsletters and announcements of NCRAL astronomy clubs sent to the editors of **Northern Lights**. If you would like to have the spotlight regularly shown on your group, be certain to have your club's editor forward a copy of your newsletter to assistant editor Carl Wenning.*

- ◆ The Twin City Amateur Astronomers continue to build their new dark sky Waynesville Observatory. The observatory now houses 10" and 16" telescopes, and the club's 20" telescope from Sugar Grove Observatory is about to be moved to WO. A new 24" f/11 on a yoke mount will be housed there as soon as the optical system is completed. The image below shows the current status of the observatory. Shown in the image to the right, from left to right, we have the following. First comes the 10'x20' roll-off-roof observatory and next at 13--diameter clamshell dome. The roll-off currently houses the club's 10" and 16" telescopes, and the dome will house the 20". Next to the dome is the observing room where all of the aforementioned imaging telescopes will be remotely controlled. To the right is a post upon which rests a weather station that will allow remote observation of the current conditions. Either side of the present clamshell dome there are two 13-foot-diameter pads. The left pad will house the new 24" f/11 under a second clamshell dome that is currently on order. The other pad can be used by visual observers at least for now.
- ◆ The Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society finished construction of their new roll-off-roof observatory on September 19th. A few images from the CUAS newsletter show this new facility, see below.



### CUAS OBSERVATORY CONSTRUCTION





# TCAA GUIDES TO AMATEUR ASTRONOMY GROWS IN NUMBER

The number of TCAA Guides to amateur astronomy has just increased yet again from six to seven. TCAA member Carl Wenning recently contributed Guide #7 – [BUYING BINOCULARS & TELESCOPES](#). This guide provides the basic information required to make informed decisions about buying quality binoculars and telescopes. This publication, suitable for the public, can help avoid the disappointment that comes with purchasing the wrong set of binoculars or an inferior quality toy telescope. Clubs might want to promote the use of this publication for those who ask for assistance in purchasing binoculars and telescopes.

This guide joins six others that are geared to improve the experience of new amateur astronomers. To read all TCAA Guides, you may retrieve them from the TCAA website at <http://tcaa.us/TCAAGuides.aspx>. The six prior TCAA Guides to Amateur Astronomy are as follows:

## **Guide #1 – [INTRODUCTION TO AMATEUR ASTRONOMY](#)**

This guide addresses the basics that everyone needs to know in order to become an amateur astronomer. It deals with the use of eyes, binoculars, and telescopes to view the night sky. It should not be mistaken for a textbook in astronomy.

## **Guide #2 – [MEMBERSHIP AND BENEFITS](#)**

Even long-time members do not know everything they need to know about membership in this club. Many benefits are overlooked and this publication does what it can to clearly illustrate the benefits of membership.

## **Guide #3 – [ASTRONOMY AS A HOBBY](#)**

Why is it that we don't attract as many amateur astronomers as we would like? Our club has lots of great benefits, and it's more the just lack of knowledge of benefits. Part of the problem today stems from the fact that many people don't understand the meaning of a hobby and the benefits derived from it.

## **Guide #4 – [THE ART OF SKY INTERPRETATION](#)**

Interpreting the sky requires more than just standing in front of a group of people and talking. If it were that easy, there would be many more speakers in our club! There is an art of sky interpretation, and this guide describes it. Even if one doesn't intend to give public talks, this guide provides a wealth of information about what can be seen in the sky with the unaided eye.

## **Guide #5 – [COORDINATING OBSERVING SESSIONS](#)**

While coordinating observing sessions might appear to be an easy task to those who attend them, there is considerable background work associated with both public and members-only sessions. Consider hosting an observing session and use this guide to assist.

## **Guide #6 – [HAVE A SUCCESSFUL OBSERVING SESSION](#)**

This guide is a reproduction of an article by the same name that appeared in the September 2017 issue of AL's *Reflector* magazine. This guide provides information about the seven p's required for having a successful observing session: **p**assion, **p**reparation, **p**rograms, **p**lanning, **p**erseverance, **p**atience, and **p**resentation.

### *Have a Successful Observing Session*

TCAA Guide #6

Jamey Jenkins



## NCRAL BYLAWS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Did you know that NCRAL has a set of Bylaws? The Region's Bylaws explain who we are, what we are about, and even include a bit of history. For instance, did you know that NCRAL was established on August 30, 1947? Did you know that NCRAL is to be governed by an Executive Council consisting of the Region's three elected officials (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary-Treasurer) in concert with the Representative to the AL Council? Did you know that there is an NCRAL Council that guides the Region in concert with the presidents and one representative of all the AL-affiliated astronomy clubs in a six-state region? If you'd like to know more about how NCRAL operates, be sure to check out the Bylaws at <https://ncral.wordpress.com/bylaws/>



By Jamey Jenkins, TCAA. Lunar X and V from 2017 Nov 26 at 0119UT. 125mm refractor at f/9.



Taken at McLean, IL in the Sugar Grove Nature Center grounds on October 17, 2017. By Jim Gibbs, TCAA. The Albireo system, Beta 1 & 2 Cygni is a double star in the constellation of Cygnus. This is one of the most observed double stars by amateur astronomers. It is visible without aid under suburban skies, 6" instruments and above will separate the two stars. This system of stars constitute the fifth brightest star in Cygnus with a magnitude of 3.07 to 4.67 since it is a variable star at a distance of about 380 light years. The bigger stars, Beta 1, is a red giant appearing orange and the second one, Beta 2, shines blue which makes the pair a pretty object in which to observe the colors of stars. Albireo A or Beta 1 is a super-giant star of class K3 burning at 4400 K with a luminosity 950 times of our Sun with 3.2 solar masses. Albireo B or Beta 2 is a class B8 main-sequence star with a temperature of 12,100 K (hence the blue appearance) with a luminosity of 190 suns and a mass of 3.3 suns.

**Editors Note:** If you have astroimages or Star Party related pictures you would like to see publish in this section email them to [jrgibbs@msn.com](mailto:jrgibbs@msn.com) by March 10th. Please include a brief description, your club affiliation and dates taken.



## OBSERVATORY EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

The late founder of the Sangamon Astronomical Society, Don Jardine, owned and maintained an observatory on his property north of Berlin, Illinois. Now, a year after his passing, Don's wife Virginia has decided to sell the property on which both home and observatory occupy. The observatory is enclosed with a 10-foot diameter Ash dome with lower drop out dome slot. The observatory houses a MEADE LX 200 telescope. Adjacent is milling shop with a metal lathe. These items are for sale and must be transported from the property by the buyer. Delivery by the seller is not negotiable.



The Ash dome might be more than 40 years old but has been serviced by Ash as recently as 10 years ago. Rotation of the dome is motorized, but slot is manually controlled. The asking price for the dome is \$10,000; however, this is a negotiable

The telescope is a Meade LX 200 14-inch f/10; it is about 15 years old. It has most of its accessories. The telescope is believed to be functioning well, but has been used little in the past few years. The telescope has no tripod, but the mounting rests to a concrete pier inside the observatory. The asking price for the telescope is \$2500, and is negotiable.

The metal lathe is a Smithy Granite model 1324. Accessories and tools that came with the lathe are included. The asking price is \$1000 and is negotiable.

If interested in acquiring any of these items, contact Matthew Will at [matthew.will@att.net](mailto:matthew.will@att.net) to make arrangement for inspecting the dome, telescope, or lathe. He is accepting quotes on behalf of Don's wife Virginia and she will have the final say on the terms of the sale.