

NCRAL REGION REPORT

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018
Carl J. Wenning, Regional Chair

Region's Executive Officers:

Chair (2-year term expires 2019)

Carl J. Wenning (Twin City Amateur Astronomers)
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Normal, IL 61761
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Vice Chair (2-year term expires 2019)

John Attewell (Rochester Astronomy Club)
3112 9th Avenue NW
Rochester, MN 55901
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Secretary/Treasurer (3-year term expires 2021)

Roy Gustafson (Popular Astronomy Club)
11 Deer Run Road
Orion, Illinois 61273
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Representative to the National Council (3-year term expires 2019)

Bill Davidson (Rochester Astronomy Club)
3705 Halling Place SW
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Region Administrative Updates:

- The Region appointed a new Secretary/Treasurer in the person of Roy Gustafson of the Popular Astronomy Club, Rock Island/Moline, IL. Email: astroroy46@gmail.com
- The Region took charge of and updated its information on the Astronomical League website
- The Region expanded the content of its own website: <http://ncral.wordpress.com/>
- The Region published four consecutive issues of **Northern Lights**, the region's quarterly newsletter. It currently averages over 18 pages per issue and is published and distributed as a PDF. All back issues of the current series are accessible on the Region's website at <https://ncral.wordpress.com/newsletter-archive/>

Notable Awards:

- Carl J. Wenning of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers received the Astronomical League's Mabel Sterns Newsletter Editor Award for 2017 during AstroCon at Casper, WY.
- No Region Award was conferred for 2018 due to a failure to solicit nominations. A process has been put in place to reasonably assure that this will not happen again.

Star Parties:

- The annual 2017 Wisconsin Observer's Weekend was held during July at Hartman Creek State Park near Waupaca, WI.
- The Iowa Star Party was held August 30 – September 3 at the Whiterock Resort in Coon Rapids, IA.
- The Sangamon Astronomical Society (Springfield, IL) hosted the Illinois Dark Skies Star Party during September at the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish & Wildlife Area in west central Illinois, September 21-23, 2017.
- The Minneapolis Astronomical Society hosted Camping with the Stars @ Eagle Lake Observatory in Norwood-Young America, July-28-30, 2017
- The Minneapolis Astronomical Society celebrated Spring and Fall Astronomy Day with special daytime activities and observing in April 29 and Sept 30, 2017.

NCRAL 2018 Regional Convention:

Dark Skies for Bright Stars was the theme of the NCRAL 2018 Regional convention held May 4-5, 2018 at the Lodge at Leathem Smith in Sturgeon Bay, WI. The event was hosted by the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society. There were nearly 70 registrants and guests in attendance. The event celebrated the recent designation of nearby Newport State Park as an International Dark Sky Site, the first in Wisconsin and only the 13th in the entire United States.

Notable Activities During 2017-2018:

- The Region was one of several states to host many observing events for the August 21, 2017, total solar eclipse that passed through Southern Illinois. Most of the path of totality was clear with one major exception, Carbondale, which hosted one of the largest observing event in the state ever (attended by many thousands) and was disappointingly clouded out moments before the start of totality.
- Effective use is now being made of the Regional Council using email as the means of communications.
- The Regional Council developed and approved a *NCRAL Convention Planning Guide* in the expectation of improving Regional conventions and growing attendance.
- The Regional Council developed and approved a NCRAL Newsletter Editor Award with a certificate for the winning editor and a \$50 honorarium for the associated club.
- The Regional Council has approved a draft document dealing with the benefits of NCRAL affiliation from which a brochure will later be produced; this brochure will complement and not compete with the AL benefit of membership brochure.
- The Region is currently developing a database of all member names and email addresses for more rapid distributions of the Northern Lights newsletter and announcements.
- The Region is adopting and adapting several TCAA Guides to Amateur Astronomy written by members of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers (Bloomington-Normal, IL) for affiliate use and public dissemination. Guides can be modified with the NCRAL affiliates' names, logos, contact information, introduction, etc. All guides named below can be accessed at the following URL: <http://tcaa.us/TCAAGuides.aspx> and editable templates will eventually find their way to the Region's website.

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| 1. <i>Introduction to Amateur Astronomy</i> | 5. <i>Coordinating Observing Sessions</i> |
| 2. <i>Membership and Benefits</i> | 6. <i>Have a Successful Observing Session</i> |
| 3. <i>Astronomy as a Hobby</i> | 7. <i>Buying Binoculars and Telescopes</i> |
| 4. <i>The Art of Sky Interpretation</i> | 8. <i>Optimizing Observations of Deep Space Objects</i> |

Two additional guides are currently being written. They are tentatively titled as follows:

9. *How to Operate and Grow an Astronomy Club*
10. *Introductory Astrophotography & Video Imaging*

- The Region developed and conducted a very substantial survey of the entire membership. Some 200 participated in this survey which produced very useful findings that will help direct the leadership of NCRAL in coming years. Detailed results of the survey can be found in the Spring 2018 issue of **Northern Lights** newsletter which can be found online at: <https://ncral.wordpress.com/newsletter-archive/>
- The Region developed and conducted its first every post-regional convention survey of participants of NCRAL 2018 in an effort to conduct and evaluation and improve future offerings. The 30-item survey is available by contacting the Regional Chair.

- The Region has slowly increased the number of posts on its Facebook page, and its newsletter has continued to grow in scope and size with several columnists now regularly contributing.
- The Region is in danger of losing Yerkes Observatory. The University of Chicago has publicly announced that they are divesting themselves of any interest in the historical site by October 1, 2018. Efforts are underway to get the University to donate the Observatory to a local Foundation. Efforts are also underway to generate a \$15 million endowment that might support the facility into the future.
- Light pollution problems continue to plague the Region. Some electric companies are promoting the installation of higher efficiency yet brighter street lights. There seems to be little concern by some communities about the astronomically preferable "cooler" illumination over that provided by blue-white LEDs despite growing evidence to support the reverse. Chicago is gravely threatened by more intense illumination in the not too distant future as the city moves to change out its lower efficiency street lights.
- Two notable amateur observatories were built in Illinois. The Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society has recently completed a 16' x 24' roll-off-roof observatory, and the Twin City Amateur Astronomers have built a 4-building observatory for dark sky astrophotography. By midsummer four telescopes will be in operation: 10" Takahashi, 16" AG Optical, 20" PlaneWave, and 24" AG Optical, each outfitted with advanced 16-megapixel astronomical cameras, filters and filter wheels, and even adaptive optics systems.

Goal and Objectives for 2018-2019:

The current administration's goal for 2018-2019 is to increase individual memberships in NCRAL-affiliated societies, promote the regional membership's involvement in NCRAL events, and increase the number of astronomy clubs participating in the Astronomical League and, by default, the Region. At its annual business meeting at NCRAL 2018 in Sturgeon Bay, WI, the Region set the following objectives for 2018-2019:

- Develop a formal logo for the Region.
- Develop a small grants program for outreach by clubs to the general public.
- Develop a small grants program for club-to-club recruitment for Astronomical League and by default NCRAL.
- Develop an NCRAL membership brochure as well as suitable recruitment materials and practices.
- Develop a survey of the NCRAL membership specifically focused on why many members do not attend Regional meetings and attempt to find what it takes to increase participation from the section of the membership.

Respectfully submitted,



Carl J. Wenning
NCRAL Chair (2017-2019)