

NORTH CENTRAL REGION ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE 2023-2024 REGION REPORT

July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024
Alan Sheidler, Regional Chair (2023-2025)



Region's Executive Officers:

Chair

Alan Sheidler (Popular Astronomy Club)
3528 56th Street Court
Moline, IL 61265
Mobile: (309) 236-0077
adsheidler@gmail.com
(first 2-year term expires May 2025)

Vice Chair

Bill Davidson (Rochester Astronomy Club)
3705 Halling Place SW
Rochester, MN 55902
(507) 273-6220
rochesterskies@outlook.com
(third 2-year term expires May 2025)

Secretary/Treasurer

Roy Gustafson (Popular Astronomy Club)
11 Deer Run Road
Orion, Illinois 61273
Mobile: 309-781-4368
astroroy46@gmail.com
(third 2-year term expires May 2026)

Regional Representative

John Attewell (Rochester Astronomy Club)
3112 9th Avenue NW
Rochester, MN 55901
(507) 398-4492
john_attewell@hotmail.com
(first 3-year term expires May 2025)

Financial Report:

Initial Balances:	\$8,877.48 (July 1, 2023)
Final Balance:	\$8,162.99 (June 30, 2024)
Difference:	\$714.49 (decrease)

NCRAL Banking Account:

Location –

CBI Bank & Trust
3535 Avenue of the Cities
P.O. Box 1070
Moline, IL 61266-1070
Phone: 309-757-0700
www.senb.com

Signatories and contact information –

NCRAL Secretary-Treasurer Roy Gustafson
astroroy46@gmail.com
11 Deer Run Road
Orion, IL 61273
Mobile: 309-781-4366

AL Treasurer William Dillon
wildil820@gmail.com

Regional Awards & Mini-Grants:

- The 2024 NCRAL Region Award, given in recognition of outstanding contributions to amateur astronomy, was presented to Matthew Ryno of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society.
- The 2024 NCRAL Newsletter Editor Award was presented to John Leeson and Greg Frohner of Cedar Amateur Astronomers for editing *The Prime Focus*.
- The 2024 NCRAL Membership Recruitment Mini Grant was awarded to the Northeast Wisconsin Stargazers to create promotional brochures, displays about the club and otherwise “sell” Newstar to new members. A grant of \$250 was given to help defray costs associated with this activity.

Region Administrative Updates:

- Under the leadership of the Vice Chair, the NCRAL Bylaws have been revised to enhance the readability and comprehensibility of the bylaws document. The objective was to simplify the critical elements of the bylaws and make them more comprehensible for a broader audience and establish a more efficient legal framework. The latest version was shared with NCRAL affiliates at the 2024 conference. A request was made at the business meeting for feedback from the Region. After a reasonable wait period, and with no requests for revision, the plan will be to put the new bylaws up for a ratification vote by affiliates.
- The Region held its NCRAL 2024 convention May 17-18, 2024, at the Bemis Conference Center, St. Norbert College, DePere, Wisconsin. The convention was hosted by the Neville Public Museum Astronomical Society, who put on a wonderful and enjoyable NCRAL 2024 convention. The program agenda and speakers were excellent and St. Norbert College was a very nice location for the conference. About 57 delegates attended this two-day event. The theme was *The Universe in Color*. The conference was relaxed, enjoyable, and educational. The tour of Parmentier Observatory was very interesting with club members showing off the club’s unique 30” telescope. There was plenty of time for networking between presentations on a range of interesting topics. Bob King’s after dinner talk was the highlight of a great lineup of speakers. The banquet meal was outstanding too. This is an excellent example of how a regional conference should be conducted. At the time of writing the report, a final accounting has not been completed, but the conference organizers expect to have approximately broken even on the event.
- The Region does not have a confirmed host for NCRAL 2025. As a result, we have put together a conference committee to find a location and organize next year’s conference. The conference committee consists of members of Iowa County Astronomers, Milwaukee Astronomical Society, Naperville Astronomical Association, Popular Astronomy Club, Rochester Astronomy Club, and Twin City Amateur Astronomers. These are folks who have worked on previous conferences or are enthusiastic volunteers wanting to contribute to developing a great NCRAL 2025 conference.

- Cedar Amateur Astronomers, at the Eastern Iowa Observatory and Learning Center, near Cedar Rapids, Iowa has volunteered to be the host of the NCRAL 2026 convention. At the time of writing of this report, there are no hosts for 2027 or beyond.
- The Region welcomes the Planetary Studies Foundation to the NCRAL. There are now 34 clubs and more than 2300 members.

Electronic Communications:

- The Region has completed the eighth consecutive year of publishing its quarterly newsletter, ***Northern Lights***. Back issues are accessible on the Region's website at <https://ncral.wordpress.com/newsletter-archive/>
- In order to provide timely communication with affiliates that cannot be accommodated by the quarterly newsletter, the Region has also developed and is now using a monthly ***NCRAL blotter***. This is typically a 1-2 page bullet point list of time sensitive items that can be quickly and easily digested by members. See <https://ncral.wordpress.com/monthly-blotter/>
- NCRAL utilizes a [self-subscribed email list](#) for disseminating the ***Northern Lights*** newsletter and other communications. Some 450 of the Region's members are subscribed.
- The Region maintains an active Facebook page in which celestial events and accomplishments worthy of note are listed regularly. Currently there are more than 445 followers of the FB page. See <https://www.facebook.com/northcentralregionastronomicalleague/>
- The Region maintains an extensive website that is regularly updated. During the last year, we have updated the member society list and contact information. See www.ncral.wordpress.com
- By my estimate there are at least 17 club newsletters published in the region. Many of these newsletters are of very high quality and loaded with information about club activities and scientific content.
- We have also created an NCRAL Speakers Bureau to provide a list of high-quality speakers for club meetings. See [SpeakersBureau](#)

NCRAL Affiliate and Member Accomplishments:

- Affiliate members earned 57 AL observing club pins and certificates during the year. These awards are recognized in the Region's newsletter.
- I am also happy to report that 65 NCRAL members have earned awards for the Region's seasonal Mini Messier Marathon.
- This Spring, several affiliate members earned NCRAL Messier Marathon Awards for observing 103 Messier objects in a single dusk-to-dawn night. This NCRAL observing program was approved at last year's 2023 conference and is now available to members. Accommodations have been made for northern observers in the Region. The program includes certificates and pins. There are levels for 103 objects, both assisted and non-assisted, and for a minimum of 70 M-objects. There are gold stars (103 unassisted), silver stars (103 assisted), and bronze stars (70 any means). The Region will provide stars and certificates.
- During last year's Alcon, the Popular Astronomy Club was selected to receive one of the ten Horkheimer Library Telescopes. I am happy to report this telescope was donated on April 28th to the Western District Library in Orion, IL. PAC has donated two library telescopes to local libraries. The other one was given to Eldridge Branch of the Scott County Library, Eldridge IA.
- The International Library Telescope Taskforce reports the North Central Region now has 65 registered public library outlets. The library telescope program is a great way for clubs to expand their public outreach efforts and dovetail with the AL's goals.

Star Parties & Club Events:

- Post pandemic club events, meetings and star parties have returned to normal operations. Many club meetings now have incorporated the use of Zoom to enable a wider audience to attend as well as provide talks from guest speakers who might not otherwise be able to attend.

- A full slate of star parties and other astronomical events is now scheduled for 2024. See the NCRAL website's [Events in 2024](#) web page for details.

NCRAL Objectives for 2024-2025:

- I am very impressed with the accomplishments of members and dynamism of clubs in the Region. Clubs have returned to normal operation after the pandemic and in many ways are stronger now than ever before. Most clubs found ways to incorporate a virtual component to their meetings enabling greater accessibility by members and ability to provide speakers from anywhere in the world. The Region continues to grow membership, which is definitely good. But there are still a number of clubs in the Region which are not members of NCRAL. Some of these clubs are very successful. As Chair, I would like to persuade them to join the AL or to understand why they are not already members. Having status as a NCRAL affiliate member provides a visible mark of credibility that should be desirable for any astronomy club. We should find ways to better communicate the advantages of AL membership. One way to do this might be to better promote the NCRAL conferences. We should go out of our way to invite non affiliates to attend the conferences. This would be a good way to inform non-members about the AL and to expose NCRAL to new ideas.
- We also need to find ways to ease the burden of hosting conferences. Serving as host is viewed by many as a daunting task and fraught with financial risk. Not having a volunteer host for NCRAL 2025 has forced the leadership team to form a conference committee. This could be an opportunity in disguise. Let's see how things go with NCRAL 2025. If this next conference is successful without a club-host, then perhaps we can retain a conference committee or group of advisors to help coach or be involved as needed to assist organizing future conferences with or without club-hosts.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Sheidler

Alan Sheidler, Chair (2023-2025)
[North Central Region Astronomical League](#)
adsheidler@gmail.com
Cell: (309) 236-0077