



# Northwest Skies

The Official Newsletter of the Tacoma Astronomical Society  
Tacoma, Washington, USA

72 Years of Amateur Astronomy in the Pacific Northwest July—August 2003

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## The President's Message

by Matt Flood

Happy summer time viewing to you all!

Now that it's a bit warmer we can get into the swing of viewing. On clearer nights our old friends are there to greet us: the summer triangle, Scorpio, Sagittarius and more. This summer we have a special treat, Mars at its closest approach to Earth in some 60,000 years. Some of our favorite viewing sites are ready too, Sunrise on Mt. Rainier and Ellensburg's Table Mountain. I plan my summer with special care to be able to attend this regional event. You can find information and registration forms at [www.tmspa.com](http://www.tmspa.com).

That's just July. August means more fun! As you may know the we are reviving the Astronomy Fair. The original Astronomy Fairs took place at the Pettinger-Guiley Observatory in Puyallup, in the early 1980's. Our

new event will be held in conjunction with Pierce College in Lakewood on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, noon to midnight. Joining our effort will be the Boeing Employees Astronomical Society (BEAS). The Astronomy Fair will present solar viewing, telescope design and building, night viewing, lectures related to astronomy, kids activities, including Astro-Jeopardy, and in general sharing our love of astronomy. We intend to have something for all family members, young and old from beginners to advanced amateurs. Much work will needed to make this event successful. Various committees have been formed for the separate functions of the Astronomy Fair. Each committee is listed as follows with the chairpersons listed.

- Lectures:  
*Matt Flood*
- Active and Static Demonstrations:  
*Bill Briggs*

- Viewing (Day and Night):  
*George Hiles*
- Kids Activities:  
*Ken Slavens*
- Concessions:  
*Lisa Schmidt*
- Publicity:  
*Dave Sherrod*
- Overall Direction:  
*Matt Flood & Ken Slavens*

This is by no means the complete list of all those individuals involved, we hope to include you too. Help make the Astronomy Fair a success by contacting a board member or the chairperson for the committee you are interested in. You can also sign up at the next general meeting. Please try to make this event one to remember by coming out, having a great time, and helping others to have fun too. Please bring your family, friends and neighbors by spreading the word!

That's just August. In September, there's even more fun! Sep-

Continued on page 8

**Northwest Skies** is a bi-monthly publication of the Tacoma Astronomical Society. All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Tacoma Astronomical Society. Personal advertising is accepted without charge from members in good standing.

Article contributions are strongly encouraged and may be submitted as an email attachment to

[editor@tas-online.org](mailto:editor@tas-online.org)

## People to Contact

You can also contact us via email through our website at:

[www.tas-online.org](http://www.tas-online.org)

Our mailing address is:

**The Tacoma  
Astronomical Society  
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Tacoma, WA 98418**

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**Bert Brown  
summarizes the  
seminars he  
attended at  
Caltech last  
May during the  
Alumni Reunion  
Weekend.**

## What's Up In Astronomy

by Bert Brown

Each Year the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) has a 'Seminar Day' in conjunction with their Alumni Reunion Weekend. The seminars are talks given by staff on current research in various fields of study, among which are astronomy and the space program. Caltech operates the Jet Propulsion Laboratory [JPL] in Pasadena. On May 17 of this year I was able to attend some of these talks and following is a summary of those of interest in astronomy.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Edward J. Stone, astronomy professor, former director of JPL, and a director of the W. M. Keck

Foundation.

His talk was entitled "Voyager's Search for the Edge of Interstellar Space". Two Voyager spacecraft have flown by and photographed Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Voyager 1 is now three times as far as Neptune and is approaching a boundary where the solar wind meets the interstellar wind created by explosions of nearby stars; hopefully it will reach that boundary before it exhausts its electrical power.

The topic for Dr. James Plout, JPL project scientist, was "Mars Odyssey." The 2001 Mars Odyssey spacecraft has been collecting data in Mars

orbit since February 2002. There is evidence of water ice in Martian soils, new kinds of color images of Mars in visible and thermal infra-red, and info about possible hazards for astronauts who might someday go there.

Dr. Oded Aharonson, Ass't. Prof. of Planetary Science, spoke on "The Surface of Mars and the Role of Water Through Time." While the present Martian surface is very dry, there is evidence of earlier valley networks and outflow channels. Recent discoveries have opened the possibility of present near-surface water. Viking and Odyssey

results were presented. (Among the references for this talk was the name "Feldman", probably Sabrina, who was our TAS speaker in May. She came to UPS from JPL.)

The only "far out" talk was by Dr. Charles Steidel, Prof. of Astronomy, whose topic was "Violence in the Young Universe." Early galaxies have recently

become accessible to wholesale observation, revealing the violent process by which they were formed. He reported on studies of the period 10 to 12 billion years ago, when galaxies had a particularly violent period and a "growth spurt" that produced most of the stars we see in the present-day sky.



## Doing the Puyallup Fair

Once again it's time to do the Puyallup Fair and do our booth in the Hobby Hall. The dates for the fair are from September 5th to the 21st. This year's fair will have a significant importance for us all since the closure of the Pettinger-Guiley Observatory. It would seem that very few people know about our shift of operations to Pierce College since attendance at our Public Nights has been light, if not nearly invisible. It's time we woke these people up and let them know what they're missing!

This is all the more reason for you to help out at our booth. Not only do you get to park for free at the

Silver lot and ride the 'Cow' buses, but you will also get free admission to the fair! Simply working 5 hours at the booth will enable you to spend the rest of your day doing the Puyallup. What better way to enjoy meeting people, explaining to the curious about our hobby and having time left over to enjoy the Northwest's largest carnival event?

Our system of operation will be the same as in previous years. We will have 3 shifts of 5 hours each (Sunday through Thursday is 4 hours for evening shift) with each shift overlapping the other for 1 hour. Shift times are as fol-

lows:

### Sunday to Thursday

- 10:00AM to 3:00PM
- 2:00PM to 7:00PM
- 6:00PM to 10:00PM

### Friday and Saturday

- 10:00AM to 3:00PM
- 2:00PM to 7:00PM
- 6:00PM to 11:00PM

Our booth will display telescope making with a cut away version of a telescope showing all the internal parts. We will also have mirror grinding demonstrations from time to time and, of course, club information will be readily available. This should be a great opportunity to let folks know that we are still alive and kicking.

Manning our booth is a

## Help Using Your Equipment

The current listing of Tacoma Astronomical Society volunteers is given below. If you need assistance or advice regarding astronomical equipment such as questions regarding operating or purchasing a telescope these volunteers can help. Please remember that they are unpaid volunteers and limit your calls to the hours between 7:00PM and 9:00PM. If you wish to become a TAS volunteer, please contact Sion Heaney.

Al George  
253.531.1171

Dave Armstrong  
425.277.2175

Contact Ken Slavens to sign up for the Puyallup Fair!

This is a great opportunity to help the society and be part of the Puyallup Fair.



### Snacks for the General Meeting

The following good people have volunteered to bring cookies or other snacks to our upcoming general meetings:

#### July 1st

Lisa Schmidt  
and  
Dave Armstrong

#### August 5th

Richard & Jill  
Carrier  
and  
Dan Gifford

Thank you for making our meetings more enjoyable.



very simple task. All that we ask of you is that you provide information about our club when asked or suggest our literature to those that look genuinely interested. There is no need for you to act the part of a salesman. Tell them about our Public Nights, where we meet, student program, etc. All of this information is in our literature including people to contact should they have questions that you are unable to answer.

As you can see it's a very simple job to help out at our booth at the Puyallup Fair. I will have to limit the num-

ber of people at each shift this year to 4 (I got in trouble for handing out too many extra tickets last year). Having more than one person each shift will allow booth operators to take breaks when needed or have more time enjoying the fair depending on how you work things out with your partners.

If you have any questions about the fair or you wish to sign up please contact me at home phone (253) 535-5869 after 6pm weeknights/anytime weekends, e-mail [AstroKen@msn.com](mailto:AstroKen@msn.com), or cell phone (253)

202-2217. Please leave a message if no answer. I will have sign up sheets at the next 3 meetings (July, August and September).

Thank you.



"When he sees the red spot on Jupiter, he wags his tail."

### Astro Fair 2003

I am pleased to announce that T.A.S. will host an AstroFair at Pierce College on Saturday, August 2nd. This event will have a

family affair theme with activities and displays for one and all.

Many of you may remember the Astro

### by Ken Slavens

Fairs held at the Pettinger Guiley Observatory during the early 80's. These fairs where well received by the public (as well as

members of the police community). The fact that the police department shut them down during their final year for lack of parking facilities should go to show how hungry the general public is for astronomy related events. We are hoping for the same reaction in the years to come since we won't have parking difficulties with the enormous parking lot at Pierce College. This is why we are hoping for a successful operation in our first year.

Of course this kind of operation will require a good amount of effort from our members as well as outside groups such as Alice

Fews' Totem Council Girl Scouts, Ken Boards' fellow Pierce County Sheriffs Deputies and the Boeing Employees Astronomy Club. We will still need a large contingency from our club to run this event. We need interactive demonstrators, lecturers, rovers, operators to man booths for static scope displays, telescope making displays, information booth, game booths, and much, much more.

This event is sure to remind the general public that the Tacoma Astronomical Society is alive and still going strong. We have not had the ability to advertise since the clo-

sure of the Pettinger Guiley Observatory and this event will help to regain our status as one of the premier astronomy clubs in the Pacific Northwest area. In order to do this we need your help. If you are willing to help out with the kid's activities please contact me at home (253) 535-5869 after 6 pm week-nights/anytime week-ends, by e-mail at [AstroKen@msn.com](mailto:AstroKen@msn.com) or by cell phone at (253) 202-2217. If you wish to volunteer for some of the static displays or other activities please contact Matt Flood at (253) 546-3302.



### Observing Hill

#### Maintenance

A special note of appreciation and thanks to Jason Christie for helping to cut back the overgrowth prior to last Saturday June 7th Public Night star gazing.

As the Tacoma Astronomical Society becomes the key user of the Observing Hill at Pierce College it is vital that we should also participate in the care of the site.

Please help by volunteering to clear the site and cutting the grass prior to events.

### Leonard Westbo

Long-time TAS member Leonard Westbo passed away from heart problems at age 71 on May 26.

A graduate of Puyallup High School, he served in the US Coast Guard, from 1951-54 and 1958-61. He graduated from the University of Washington College of Engineering. He was an electronics engineer for the FAA Auburn Traffic Control Center 1961-72, and was Assistant

Branch Chief, Electronics Engineering, for the 13th Coast Guard District in Seattle 1972-87. In addition to TAS, he was a member of Puget Sound Theater Organ Society; a radio "Ham", W7MCU, belonging to several amateur radio clubs; and a private pilot.

He was also a member of Puget Sound Chapter of American Meteorological Society and attended their meet-

### 1931—2003

ings at NOAA (National Weather Service) at Sand Point, Seattle.

Many TAS members who were also close friends of Leonard paid their last respects at the Memorial service held on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

The Tacoma Astronomical Society placed a wreath of flowers and message of condolences at the service. Len will be greatly missed.

## July 2003

### Schedule of Events

- **July 1st:**  
General meeting at UPS, Thompson Hall Room 130. 7:30 PM
- **July 15th:**  
Board Meeting at Sion and Tami's home, 8218 North 9th Street, Tacoma. 7:30 PM
- **July 19th:**  
Public Night at Pierce College, Sunrise Building Room 118. 9:00PM
- **July 19th & 22nd:**  
Public Night at Pierce College, Sunrise Building Room 118. 9:00PM
- **July 19th and 22nd:** Astronomy Presentation at Lakewood Library. Joe Witherspoon will make a presentation on the Scale of the Solar System. If you wish to help or would like more info contact Joe at (253) 537-1217
- **July 8th to 31st:** NASA Exhibit at Lakewood Library. The Lakewood Library is looking for some expertise to help answer astronomy related questions while being host to the NASA interactive exhibit. For more info please contact Joe Witherspoon.

### May General Meeting Minutes

It was noted that a better turn out for public nights was needed. We need to improve advertising of the public nights and other TAS events.

TAS announced it will hold an Astronomy Fair on August 2, 2003. Plans are to start at noon and run-

ning until midnight. Committees are being set up for the planning of the Astronomy Fair.

The Newsletter Editor stated he needs more articles. He also announced that 85% of the active members have converted to reading or downloading the newsletter

by Joan Koch

from the website.

Chuck Johnson showed a digital video of sun spots, Jupiter and Saturn.

The speaker was Dr. Sabrina Granman. She talked about the Search for Life on Mars and Europa.

# July 2003

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 7:30PM General Meeting,	2	3	4	5
6 ☽	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 ☉	14	15 7:30PM Board Meeting	16	17	18	19 9:00PM Public Night
20	21 ☾	22	23	24 Table Mountain Star Party	25 Table Mountain Star Party	26 Table Mountain Star Party
27	28	29 ●	30	31		

### June General Meeting Minutes

The speaker was Dr. Chuck Jacobson who presented a seminar on building better telescopes. He focused upon the optics of Newtonian scopes and detailed how one identifies many of the optical considerations and defects one would need to address to improve the optics.

He emphasized the importance of star testing and demanding better optics in any scope and his seminar was structured carefully to take the audience through those steps necessary in determining the optics of Newtonian scopes. He detailed various

by Sion Heaney

optical defects and how one may measure and correct for them. The seminar covered many other areas of improving telescopes. Overall the information was presented in an understandable and accessible manner with plenty of supporting materials.

### August 2003

#### Schedule of Events

- **August 2nd:** Astronomy Fair at Pierce College. Noon to Midnight. Sign up and help, come along and enjoy!
- **August 5th:** General meeting at UPS, Thompson Hall Room 130. 7:30 PM
- **August 9th:** Star Party at Des Moines Parks and Recreation Field House, 1000 South 220th Street. Call Ken Slavens for more details. 9:00 PM
- **August 19th:** Board Meeting at Joe Witherspoon home, 8708 59th Avenue SW, Lakewood. 7:30 PM
- **August 22nd:** Student Meeting. Pierce College, Cascade Rm 203. 7:00 PM Law Enforcement Youth Camp. Sunset Lake. Contact Ken Board at (253) 875 4761 for more information.
- **August 23rd:** Public Night. Pierce College. 9:00 PM
- **August 28th to 30th:** Oregon Star Party.

# August 2003

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2 Astro Fair
3	4	5 ☽ 7:30PM General Meeting.	6	7	8	9 9:00PM Star Party.
10	11	12 ○	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 ☾ 7:30PM Board Meeting.	20	21	22 7:00PM Student Meeting.	23 9:00PM Public Night.
24	25	26	27 ●	28 Oregon Star Party.	29 Oregon Star Party.	30 Oregon Star Party.
31						

## Northwest Skies



### First Class

If undelivered, please return to

Tacoma Astronomical Society  
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8218 North 9th Street  
Tacoma, WA 98406

Phone: 253-460-0599  
Email: [editor@tas-online.org](mailto:editor@tas-online.org)

### We need your articles.

If you are interested in contributing an article or would like to make a suggestion as to what you'd like to read in **Northwest Skies** then do make the effort to contact the Editor. We are always in need of contributions.

We're on the web!  
[WWW.TAS-ONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.TAS-ONLINE.ORG)

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tember is "Do the Puyallup" time. The Tacoma Astronomical Society booth at the Puyallup fair will again be "The Telescope Makers Art". This has been well received the last couple of years. Mirror grinding has been a big crowd pleaser. We're hoping to expand our booth this year, maybe with some telescope cut away models. If you have any interesting and educational telescope parts such as lenses, spiders, testers, focusers, mirrors, or mounts that you can spare please contact me or a board member. Please be

sure to read Ken Slavens article in this edition of Northwest Skies for more information on the Puyallup Fair. The sign up sheets for booth time will be at the July, August, and September General Meetings. We must cover all the time slots! As usual, all 17 days of the fair will be broken down into three shifts. Please sign up to help, as this is our biggest opportunity of the year to spread our enthusiasm for astronomy and information about our club.

I'm ending this edition of the President's

Message on a more somber note. One of Tacoma Astronomical Society's old friends, Len Westbo, passed away in early June. Many of our members were long-time friends of Len, not just in TAS, but in many other activities. I think I can speak for all when I say, we mourn his passing and I can personally say that as your President, I hope no more of our friends have to leave us on my watch.

Best Wishes, Matt Flood