



In This Issue

IYA 2009 – International Year of Astronomy

Message from the Webmaster

2009's Executive Team

Meeting Minutes from November

Pretty Big Shoes to Fill
(Editorial)

Next Meeting

January 2, 2009
Loyalist College
(Pioneer Building P1)

Observing Night

December 27th
Pulver Rd.

Editor's Pic' Pick



Starfest Pot of Gold
By Greg Lisk

For the full colour version, and more images, check our web gallery on the RASC Belleville Website www.rascbelleville.ca

What'sup!

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Belleville Centre Newsletter

IYA 2009!

As we all know by now, the UN (United Nations) has declared 2009 to be the International year of astronomy. That's nice, but what does that mean?

It means the RASC on the National and Centre levels are putting forth a big initiative to bring astronomy to the public – especially to young people as part of UNESCO's mandate. (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)

For the Belleville Centre of the RASC, our fearless leader, President Greg Lisk, is heading up the IYA 2009 School Challenge. Working with our Webmaster Les Dempsey, there will be a web resource on our site that give people information on the program, downloadable materials and a place to record the events.

Message from the Webmaster

Many moons ago, I created the current version of our website. I think it's time for a polish. Over the next few months, visitors to the site at www.rascbelleville.ca may notice some pages just don't look right. These will be times where I'm working on those pages.

I don't plan to change much in the way of content or functionality. I'm hoping that even though I'm shining up the look and layout, it will be cleaner and faster than the current version.

Also, a reminder that if you've never been to the website, your RASC Belleville membership gives you access to lots of members-only content. If you don't have your personal username and password, please click "Website Feedback" at the very bottom centre of the website to ask for help.

2009 Executive Team

Feeling the election burnout yet? After our own federal election, and watching the US Presidential election, we all might well be tired of elections. But wait, there's more! At our November 2008 meeting, we held our annual elections. Here are the results.

President	Greg Lisk
Vice President	David Cotterell
National Council Rep	Don Town
Webmaster	Les Dempsey
Secretary	Joanne Burns
Observing Chair	Greg Lisk
Events Co-Ordinator	Andrew Mason
Newsletter Editor	Les Dempsey
Librarian	Antonina Vassilieva-Durham
Treasurer	Garth Penn

November 2008 Meeting Minutes

- 19 persons in attendance at Friday, Nov. 7 RASC Belleville meeting.
- December meeting is being held as usual - Friday, December 5
- Christmas Dinner - Saturday, December 6, 6:00 p.m. at the Winchester Arms, on Dundas St. E., in Belleville
- Motion moved and passed that Richard be reimbursed in the amount of \$80.00 for printing expenses (ink cartridges, etc.). These expenses were incurred printing handouts for various RASC Belleville Centre meetings
- "Great Worldwide Star Count." Constellation Cygnus is used to determine how many stars can be seen naked-eye from different locations worldwide. Good project for amateurs. From Oct 20 to Nov 3. Website: http://www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/starcount/
- Greg played us the new song "On the Shoulders of Giants," by Padi Boyd
- November observing night Nov. 28 or 29
- Moon interferes with this year's Leonids meteor shower, so probably not worth it to have a group observing night for this.
- IYA 2009 - Greg has managed to get a scope donated by Celestron and also raised money to buy one on his own for International Year of Astronomy 2009 and is also in the process of producing projects for the IYA 2009 School Challenge. Any ideas from club members is appreciated.

Pretty Big Shoes to Fill

While out one night looking up some remote NGC Objects, I got to wondering "What am I doing? Here's a galaxy I just found. I didn't discover it. I looked it up in an atlas, and star-hopped my telescope to it. Why?"

Astronomy - from Greek "Astro Nomos" meaning "Star Law" The laws that govern the motion of the things we see moving in the sky; the Sun, Moon, planets, and the odd comet against the background of stars, seems simple. It used to be. Of course, with the invention of the telescope, we've learned of asteroids, more planets, moons around other planets, nebulae, and other whole galaxies, to paint a much bigger picture than man could have ever imagined just a few hundred years ago. In recent years, however, astronomy has taken on a whole new role. Now we look to astronomy in our search for answers to life's biggest questions.

Stardust - NASA's mission to comet Wild 2. Its basic goal was to bring back samples of material blasted off the comet. Success! The craft returned safely with intact samples up to 1mm in size. The mission's loftier goal though is to see if any organic compounds or even microscopic life forms exist in these samples. Could Comets have seeded life on this little blue pearl?

WMAP - looking at the oldest light in the universe. By mapping the "Infant Universe" the program has produced a new image of what the universe looked like in it's first trillionth of a second. Furthermore, the mission has pinpointed the age of the universe to 13.7 billion years. Before, it was loosely confined to anywhere from 12 to 15 billion years.

SETI - the Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence. The bigger the picture gets, the more we have to wonder about the existence of life and whole civilizations out there on other planets. We've been listening for decades, and we've even sent out a few messages ourselves.

NASA's NEO (Near Earth Object) Program. We're searching the skies, looking for objects which might come in contact with our home planet. If something could impact the Earth, we hope to know about it in time to do something about it and prevent what could be the end of life on Earth; or at least ours.

Space exploration has been looking at the creation of the universe, the origins of life on Earth, and even preventing the destruction of the earth. These are some pretty big shoes to fill. These questions used to be, and for many people still are, the domain of religion. We may never answer them fully, but we are getting closer. Of course, if we do find out for sure that "Yes, life came to Earth aboard a rogue comet caught up by the gravity of our Sun," the next question is "Where did life FIRST emerge and how did living organisms come to hitch a ride on a comet?" If we find out for sure that "Yes, this is exactly how the Big Bang happened, when and where," the bigger question will be "Why?" and "What was before the Big Bang?" Something must have caused it. Causality says that the cause chronologically precedes the effect. If nothing existed, not even time, before the Big Bang, than it had no cause. This would mean that the universe is the effect of no cause; it just is.

Pretty Big Shoes to Fill (Continued)

So where does that leave you and me? Out in a field with a telescope, looking at star charts and hunting down faint fuzzies that we know to be Galaxies and Nebulae. What are we doing in the big picture? That's like asking a model train hobbyist what he's doing for the railroad industry. Nothing. Amateur astronomy is a hobby. We look for things we already know to be there, with the exception of comet hunters. Most of us just like to be out under the stars away from the hustle and bustle of civilized life. It's nice to look at the wonders of the universe and just marvel at them. Consider the Orion Nebula. Here is the beautiful result of a massive explosion that leaves gas and dust strewn all over the place. All this debris is collecting to form new stars, new solar systems and maybe someday, new life and a new civilization.

RASC Belleville member, Dave Cotterell said it best, "Never forget the importance of just looking at something because its pretty." So keep looking and marveling. And whether you look and marvel at God's Creation, or the vastness of our scientific advances, just enjoy the view.