

Astrofiles

Auburn Astronomical Society E-Newsletter April, 2011

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Events Calendar

We'll hold our February meeting on **Friday, April 1** (no fooling), at **7:45PM**, [in room 215](#) of [Davis Hall](#), the Aerospace Engineering Building. Riders from the Montgomery area are welcome to meet at the [home](#) of Russell Whigham, [518 Seminole Dr.](#), and carpool over to Auburn. Plan to be ready to leave for Auburn at 6:45PM.

Our star party this month will be on **Saturday, April 9**, in conjunction with the Forest Preserve Stargaze, on Moore's Mill Road (see below).

April 01, Monthly meeting **7:45PM**, [in room 215](#) of [Davis Hall](#).

April 03, New Moon; Saturn at opposition

April 09, Forest Preserve Stargaze 7:00-9:00

April 11, First quarter moon

April 17, Full Moon, Moon at perigee (another Big Moon)

April 24, Third quarter Moon

May 03, New Moon

May 07, Astronomy Day for 2011/ May AAS meeting

May 10, First quarter Moon

May 17, Full Moon

May 24, Third quarter Moon

Astronomy Day

Astronomy Day 2011 will be on **Saturday, May 7**, at the [W. A. Gayle Planetarium](#). Here are the programs Rick is working on for this year:

- [Ham the space Chimp](#) Retired Col. Marvin Grunzke; Faulkner University
- [Space Camp](#) Melissa Snider, Camp Education Programs Manager,
- The [James Wylie Shepherd Observatory](#); Dr. Michael Patton & Dr. Michael Sterner, University of Montevallo
- Extraterrestrial Aliens: Friends, Foes, or Just Curious? By George Michael

[Please let me know](#) if you can help with your telescope. More on this next month.

Forest Ecology Preserve Stargaze
Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest
Auburn AL
Saturday, April 9, 2011
7:00PM-9:00PM

Jennifer Lolley and the members of her Forest Ecology Preserve group have invited us back to the Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest for this year's "Spring Stargaze".

Sunset will be just after 7:00pm. The gate will be open from 5:30 on, if you prefer to set up your scope before dark. We'll need 10-12 telescopes to accommodate the usual 200+ visitors.

[Please let me know](#) if you can help with your telescope.

Directions to Mary Olive Thomas Forest:

For those familiar with Auburn: On Moore's Mill Road, one mile east of the Ogletree Village shopping center ... on the north side of the road. There will be a sign at the gate. The shopping center is at the intersection of Moores Mill Road and Ogletree-Hamilton road. This intersection is east of Dean Road, on Moore's Mill.

For those coming from out of town: take exit 58 off I-85 (Tigertown exit) south (away from Tigertown) on Gateway Drive . Follow the curve toward the east and, approximately 0.7 miles after you get off the interstate, turn right on Society Hill Road (runs north-south). It's a fairly large intersection, so it'll be hard to miss. Approximately 3.2 miles later, Society Hill intersects Moores Mill at a flashing red light. There's a convenience store called the LAZ-B at this intersection. Turn right on Moores Mill. The gate will be about 0.9 mile on the right.

Latitude: 32° 34.881'N
Longitude: 85° 25.328'W

[Map](#)

If this will be your first time there, you can have a look at our past stargazes there at: <http://www.auburnastro.org/trips/outreach/fep.htm>

Web Links

From **Frank Ward**:

Thought you would enjoy this **Northern Lights** video. My wife found and shared it. <http://vimeo.com/21294655>

I continue to be amazed at the beautiful planetary images by **Brian Combs** from his observatory near Buena Vista, GA. <http://www.bcastropics.com/images>

Member News

AAS treasurer, John Zachry, wrote to say that **Gail Smitherman** has renewed her membership. Gail is our only member from the Selma area and finds it difficult to attend most of our events, but we hope to see her again this year for Astronomy Day.

From **David Hofland**, Centre AL

I just finished a new 16" f/4.5 and I am about finished with a 22" f/3.6. Weather hasn't been very cooperative, and I'm beginning to think my new telescopes are to blame 😊. Hopefully the clear moonless nights will return soon.

From **Elliot Errera**

Just wanted to remind you guys, that I had finally been relocated to Newport News, Va. So it would be a bit difficult to get to a meeting. 😊 Please, (reluctantly) remove my email address from your list.

Keep looking up!
Elliot Errera

You'll be missed, Elliot. At least now, you're bilingual and shouldn't have much trouble speaking Virginian. ;-) We enjoyed your stay here.

Last month, I received this e-mail:

My name is Kelly Nicastro and I am a writer for the **Auburn Plainsman**. This week I'm writing an article about Virgin's commercial space flight proposal and was wondering if I could ask you about your thoughts on the idea. I'd like to know whether or not you think that traveling commercially into space is a good or bad idea and what could be the consequences or benefits that could come from it. Thank you so much for your time. Look forward to hearing from you.

Kelly Nicastro

I forwarded the message to Rhon. Here's his excellent summary:

Ms. Nicastro,

My name is Rhonald Jenkins. I'm a retired Emeritus Professor of Aerospace Engineering at Auburn University and president of The Auburn Astronomical Society. During the past 40 years, I've worked as an engineer in the aerospace industry and been involved as a faculty member in research with government agencies, primarily NASA. FWIW, I'll give you my 2 cents. Please note that this is my opinion only and I do not in any way represent Auburn University with this opinion.

Any large scale effort in spaceflight must involve government support, simply because of the tremendous sums of money involved. Private industry either does not have the huge amounts of capital outlay required, or is unwilling to risk the entire cost. One cannot blame them for this, since companies are businesses run for profit, and most of them have to answer to their shareholders.

NASA is a government agency, and like all such agencies is a bureaucracy. The tendency for NASA is to be very conservative, especially since the shuttle accidents. For instance, the space shuttle of today was designed over 40 years ago. No major design changes have been made over that time, though several have been suggested. This is certainly understandable, but tends to repress more creative approaches to a problem. Companies could be (but are not necessarily) more creative in their thinking. But make no mistake about it; industry can make creative mistakes too. Unfortunately, the usual rule in both government and industry when a new idea is presented is "that's a great idea ... we'll might try it someday, but we need something we are sure will work right now". So advances in, say, propulsion systems come slowly.

I think that the most efficient approach for commercial spaceflight is to have a true partnership between government and industry. By this I mean that government would provide significant startup money so that all the risk would not be assumed by industry. Government (NASA) would NOT impose significant restrictions or rules on the use of the money, except for a mutual agreement as to what the final goal is. Personally, I believe that NASA should stick to what is done so beautifully in the past ... unmanned exploration of the solar system and basic research. The partnership would then concentrate on commercial spaceflight.

I've taken a lot of time to answer your basic question about commercial spaceflight, but here it is in a nutshell: development of commercial spaceflight is an absolute necessity if humankind is to really blossom into space. I'm certain, however, that this will not happen until commercial spaceflight is made profitable

Rhonald Jenkins

From: Michael Sterner, **University of Montevallo**
Date: Mon, 28 Mar 2011 Subject: We won!

We would like to express our gratitude to the UM community and to all JWSO supporters. We were awarded \$1,500 in grant money from the Rain Bird Intelligent Use of Water competition.

Please continue to support us in #2 and #3 below. The voting (and viewing) ends 30 June 2011.

[The James Wylie Shepherd Observatory](#) is attempting to construct an outbuilding consisting of a control room, storage room, and restroom with self-composting toilets and recycled rainwater.

These grant proposals will help us raise the necessary funds for the project.

√ 1. (\$1500) Vote for our Intelligent Use of Water Award grant proposal at <http://www.iuowawards.com/Projects.aspx#project|b7a1c29f-9b49-4130-9493-776b04583c4d>

Please consider putting a shortcut to the site on your computer desktop, and vote daily to help support the growth of the James Wylie Shepherd Observatory complex at the University of Montevallo.

You may vote once per day. Voting ends on 22 March 2011.

2. (\$1000 - \$3000) Vote for our True Hero: Rewarding Community Service grant proposal at <http://truehero.org/projects/index.cfm?id=538>

You may only vote once per email address, and you must supply your email address to confirm your vote. (You will receive a confirmation email to validate your vote, but will not be put on any spam lists.)

3. (\$1000) Watch the YouTube Video at the above link! This is a separate competition.

You may watch the YouTube video as often as you like (as often as possible). The True Hero voting ends 30 June 2011.

With many thanks,

Aaron Traywick
Annie Chester
Michael Patton
Michael Sterner
UM Environmental Club
UM Astronomy Club

Hope to see everyone at the meeting,

Russell