

Results of the NEKAAL Members Interest Inventory

Summary

Last fall, NEKAAL members were asked to complete a questionnaire about what they liked, or didn't, about astronomy in general and NEKAAL in particular. Thanks very much to all who participated. The results were tallied and reported to the board late last year but hadn't been reported to the membership, yet because 1) we were waiting for the new version of *The Observer*, and 2) I kept forgetting to write it up for the new version of *The Observer*. Having gotten a small part of my act in order, here it is.

Overall, we're doing pretty well. There weren't any vehement complaints about NEKAAL, and the comments we received didn't contain any bombshells. A lot of people actually read and use *The Observer*, which was nice to know, especially for Graham Bell and Bill Leifer, the recent and brand-new editors of said publication.

Most members want to do more astronomy than they've been doing. The most commonly expressed reason for the discrepancy was "lack of time". No surprise there; American culture has become a mad scramble to accomplish a lot in too little time. (Personal note: That's one of the things I like about observing: the stars keep on doing their thing just as they're supposed to, no matter what happens in our little world. Puts things in perspective.)

On a related subject, it was sad though not surprising that so few people utilize the excellent resource we have in Farpoint Observatory. As light pollution steals away our view of the night sky, we should get out there and see what we can while we can.

Response

The board has already acted on one suggestion. Brian Martin is doing a short presentation at the beginning of each general meeting about a facet of observing, starting with the requirements for the Constellation Hunter certificate from the Astronomical League.

Hands-On Sessions: The recent Messier Half-Marathon was, in part, a hands-on session, in that everyone observes and helps others to do the same. (Wait— isn't that what happens at star parties?) Those who indicated an interest in these workshops will be contacted further to get more information on how best to respond to this need.

Site selection: Transportation is a problem issue for several people, and impacts participation in specific events for others. It may be possible to conduct some events, like hands-on session, at a location that's more convenient for more people. More to come on this one.

Details

The summarized results of the survey follow, listed on a survey form. Numerical results are either a) the number of responses for that item (ex.: #2), or b) the average weight given to that item (ex.: #3).

If you have any questions on the survey itself, contact me. If you have any general questions or comments, please contact any board member. We *really, really* want to hear from you!

--Janelle Burgardt

NEKAAL Interest Inventory

Name RESULTS _____

1. How long have you been a member of NEKAAL?

- a) 0-3 years b) 3-10 years c) over 10 years
a) 7 b) 10 c) 7

2. What topics are you interested in?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| a) space program 11 | h) search for extra-terrestrial life & planets 9 |
| b) astronomical observation 21 | i) astrobiology 5 |
| c) astronomical research 9 | j) astrophysics 6 |
| d) light pollution 5 | k) history of astronomy 7 |
| e) science education 7 | l) current topics in astronomy 11 |
| f) cosmology 10 | m) other <i>equipment, radio astronomy, photography</i> |

3. Of the topics listed in Question 2, please rank your interest in order, with **1** meaning most interested.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ___ space program 3.5 | ___ search for extra-terrestrial life & planets 4.0 |
| ___ astronomical observation 2.5 | ___ astrobiology 4.0 |
| ___ astronomical research 3.8 | ___ astrophysics 3.5 |
| ___ light pollution 4.8 | ___ history of astronomy 4.7 |
| ___ science education 3.7 | ___ current topics in astronomy 4.5 |
| ___ cosmology 2.7 | ___ other 4.7 _____ |

4. What astronomical activities are you interested in?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| a) reading about it 16 | f) spectroscopy 5 |
| b) naked-eye observing 13 | g) solar observing 6 |
| c) binocular/telescopic observing 17 | h) star party 12 |
| d) FAST/NEO research program 10 | i) demonstrations, lectures 9 |
| e) astrophotography 13 | j) other <i>outreach, lunar observing</i> _____ |

5. What astronomical activities do you currently participate in?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) reading about it 15 | f) spectroscopy 1 |
| b) naked-eye observing 15 | g) solar observing 2 |
| c) binocular/telescopic observing 16 | h) star party 4 |
| d) FAST/NEO research program 3 | i) demonstrations, lectures 7 |
| e) astrophotography 5 | j) other _____ |

6. Many people are not as involved in astronomy as they would like to be. What are some of the things keeping you from doing what you'd like to do? Circle all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| a) not enough time 15 | g) don't know what's available 0 |
| b) don't have a place to observe 4 | h) transportation issues 4 |
| c) don't have any equipment 1 | i) health issues 3 |
| d) don't know where to start 0 | j) activities not scheduled at a convenient time 3 |
| e) don't know what to do 0 | k) I'm satisfied with what I'm doing now 4 |
| f) don't know how to do what I want to do 0 | l) other _____ |

7. What astronomy resources do you use? Circle all that apply.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a) The Observer 15 | e) Internet 17 |
| b) Sky & Telescope magazine 14 | f) books, charts, DVDs 14 |
| c) Astronomy magazine 9 | g) newspapers 7 |
| d) other magazines 8 | h) other _____ |

8. How do you find out about NEKAAL activities?

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| a) The Observer 13 | d) word of mouth 8 |
| b) NEKAAL website 9 | e) other <i>_emails(3), general mtgs_</i> _____ |
| c) newspaper 0 | |

9. How often do you use Farpoint Observatory?

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| a) never been there 11 | b) once or twice 8 | c) several times a year 11 |
| d) several times a month 2 | e) I live there 1 | |

10. Do you own binoculars or a telescope? Y / N *_Y=15, N=2*

If so, what type? _____

11. Would you be interested in hands-on workshops in any of these areas? Circle any that apply.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| a) visual observing 11 | e) astrophotography 11 |
| b) binocular observing 5 | f) I'm doing fine, thanks 4 |
| c) using a telescope 9 | g) other <i>_spectroscopy, radio astronomy_</i> _____ |
| d) using star charts 6 | |

12. What can NEKAAL do for you that isn't being done now?

Provide transportation

Increase membership

Get message out better or improving it

I have received great benefit from NEKAAL

Publicize board minutes

13. How can NEKAAL do better?

(in addition to answers from #12

have more demonstrations, like polar alignment

using LX200 at FPO

14. Comments / suggestions / complaints?

Transportation

Went to FPO, but no one there; should have called first

I love Farpoint!

Suggest a short segment on observing at each meeting, maybe on observing in the city