

Astronomy Day—Two in 2007?

By Janelle Burgardt

Astronomy Day, historically held in the spring, will also be held in the fall in 2007. Why the double event, and how will NEKAAL participate?

What is it? Astronomy Day is a grass roots movement designed to share the joy of astronomy with the general population - "Bringing Astronomy to the People". First held in California in 1973, events are now held at hundreds of sites across the U.S. and in countries worldwide. In the U.S., it is usually scheduled sometime between mid-April and mid-May, on a Saturday near or before the first-quarter moon.

Why two? The Astronomical League is the coordinator of Astronomy Day events, including scheduling, assistance to local groups, and disseminating reports of club activities. In response to discussion as to whether Astronomy Day would be better scheduled in autumn, they decided to schedule **two** events this year, on April 21 and September 15.

What happens on Astronomy Day? Activities vary, but some of the things that have been done include talks by astronomers, games, prizes, scale models of the solar system, space ballets and poetry, and of course, actual outdoor observing (daytime and nighttime) with telescopes. Many organizations host elaborate exhibits at shopping malls, museums, nature centers, libraries, etc.

What has NEKAAL done? Two-part answer to this one:

1) *In the past*--NEKAAL set up telescopes at White Lakes and Fairlawn Plaza malls, with games and displays about astronomy.

2) *In the recent past*--not very much. Open Houses at Farpoint have been the extent of our involvement. Which brings us to the Big Question: **WHY?!**

There are several things that have happened:

- ☆ **INSURANCE**—We can no longer just "set up" in shopping malls or parking lots. To do an event of any type, we have to provide our own liability insurance, which is ex-pen-sive, if we can find it at all. We just don't have the money.
- ☆ **LOCATION**—We don't have access to a well-traveled site that is suitable for night-time observing. People are leery of going anywhere at night that isn't well-lit, and light's a big problem for us! We don't know of a good place to hold inside events, although we have one that we're considering.
- ☆ **EQUIPMENT**—It would be great to be able to do some daytime astronomy, but we don't have the equipment necessary for solar observing. A Helios 1 H-alpha scope purchased years ago is no longer serviceable. We've considered purchasing a Coronado scope, but that hasn't been feasible financially.
- ☆ **OTHER PRIORITIES**—We've been doing a lot in the past five years! We now have the Tombaugh telescope, which will be freed up soon from its NASA obligations. The Kessler Education Building is operational, though not yet at full function. We've gotten some great equipment for education and outreach, some

of which (2 telescopes!) can also be used for personal observing by properly trained club members. And we've gotten some new computers, a wireless connection to the internet, a phone at FPO—we even get the yard mowed again!

What can NEKAAL do? Observing, researching, talking about what we're here for: astronomy. Good old-fashioned "look at this neat stuff" astronomy. A telescope is a people magnet. We just need to figure out a populous place to do it...AND...

Due to the overwhelming generosity of member Ed Woerner, we have a Coronado PST H-alpha telescope on loan through the spring. It's already been used by several hundred school children to observe the sun, with enough wide-eyed oohs and ahhs to justify its use in just one day. It would be GREAT to use it for the spring Astronomy Day; we just have to find a place. We're looking, but—

Anything I can do? Simple: suggest a location, an event or any other idea for showing off astronomy. Invite us to a school, civic or church event. Provide feedback, on anything you'd like to do or see, to anyone on the board. Or, if you have a current liability policy you can provide at a reasonable price.....