

Southern Maine Astronomers
Club Meeting & Annual Meetings
May 2, 2024 7:00 p.m.

Attending were members Dave Gay, Howie Marshall, Dave Crocker, Kevin Kane, Russell Pinizzotto, George Bokinsky, Greg Shanos, Al DiSabatino, Roy Reigel, Craig Snapp, Dean Ostergaard, Mike Simmons, Jeremy Wright, Bob Dodge, Dwight Burkard, Mike Mack, Brad Irish, Carson Hanrahan, Haruki Tagaki, Mark Harrington, Steve Tondreau, Russell Clark, Dave Manchester, Dwight Lanpher, Anita DeVito, Greg Zdenek, Joe Long, Forrest Sumner, Kat Taylor, Paul Howell and Rob Burgess and guests Jon Silverman, Kevin Berry, Beverly Clark, Greg KCIRID ME, David [BLANK], Zoom User [Unidentified] and our guest speaker, Philippe Reekie

For purposes of the Annual Meeting of Members, a quorum of 22 (at least 25% of the membership) was met with 31 members in attendance. There was also a quorum of Directors with ten in attendance for purposes of the Annual Meeting of Directors.

Rob Burgess opened the formal portion of the meeting and welcomed new members Sean Lena and family, Haruki Tagaki (a Japanese exchange student at Fryeburg Academy), Jon Bumpus and Greg Zdenek, as well as several guests to tonight's meeting including Jon Silverman, President of Central Maine Astronomical Society

Recent activities by members:

- Craig Snapp reported he has imaged 54 Caldwell objects with his EV equipment, working his way toward an AL Observing award. Russ Pinizzotto has hit 70 target objects toward his next AL observing program. He also mentioned that the Astro League has two levels of Eclipse Observing awards that he thinks many members who witnessed totality could qualify for.
- Rob thanked Jon Wallace and Ron Thompson for all their pre-eclipse speaking engagements with various libraries on behalf of the club.
- Rob noted that Friday, May 3 was Maine Space Day, celebrated this year at Greeley Middle School in Cumberland. He and Ron Thompson were participating on behalf of SMA.

Announcements:

- The next meeting on June 6 will focus on four to six topics relating to basic astronomy or stargazing techniques and will be pitched primarily to those new to astronomy. Russ and Carson will choose the topics and seek club members to present. The same format will be followed at the November club meeting so as to provide some "basic training" for our newer members. The first star party of the year is set for May 18 at the Cumberland Fair Grounds in Cumberland. It has excellent horizons in all directions.
- A schedule of other star parties will be released shortly.

- The club will host an Open House at our Neptune Dr HQ, probably in mid-June, with some lunar observing possible. Excess club equipment will be available for purchase.
- The next Directors' meeting will be Wednesday, May 15, via zoom. All members are welcome to attend.

Guest Speaker: Philippe Reekie, Harvard College Observatory

Rob introduced Philippe Reekie of the Harvard College Observatory and the Center for Astrophysics. Philippe has several advanced degrees in planetary science and astrobiology and is a skilled science communicator, making the technical comprehensive to a wide audience. He received his advanced degrees from the University of Edinburgh.

His talk focused on an aspect of astrobiology for which he has a passion: the ability of salts to preserve microbial specimens. A collector of biological specimens encased in amber, Dr. Reekie stated that salts had the ability to do the same and could therefore be a focus of our explorations outside Earth for evidence of life. He noted the presence of salty water underground on Mars as perhaps a preserver of past (or present) microbial life. NASA has documented briny water seeping out of crater walls, and also speculated of the existence of a huge underground salty lake beneath the south pole. He referenced Lake Vostok in Antarctica, that lies under 2.2 miles of ice, that has been isolated for 20 million years. When Russian scientists drilled into the lake it was very salty but full of life.

In lab experiments he noted that when microbes were placed in salts of chlorides, sulfates and perchlorates and left to dry into crystalline form that table salt – NaCl – was the most promising medium, with 5,000 inclusions within a 1 mm section in which life forms were revealed. When looking to Mars, most salts were perchlorates (an ingredient in rocket fuel) which are highly toxic and corrosive. The concentration of perchlorates on Mars is estimated at 10,000 times that on Earth. Recognizing that the crystalline structure would not protect organisms, Dr. Reekie stated that looking at glass encasements to preserve microbes and could allow for rejuvenation. He stated that such glassification could happen at Mars' poles at their ambient temperatures of -153°C.

Dr. Reekie's talk gave us new insights into where and how we might find evidence of past life as we explore neighboring planets and the outreaches of our solar system. He also provided us with a scientific basis for panspermia.

Annual Meetings:

In the absence of Club Secretary Ara Jerahian who was unable to attend Rob called the Annual Meeting of the Membership to order. He recognized outgoing directors Al DiSabatino, Maame Andoh and previously resigned director Kerry Kertes for their service to the club, highlighting how each director brought insight and energy to the club and helped make it the stronger club that it is today. All were thanked for their service.

Rob noted that the Annual Meeting of the Membership was noted to the members on March 8, 2024, more than 14 days in advance as required by the bylaws, and that the meeting was being

undertaken electronically via Zoom, as permitted under §9 of the bylaws. At the time of the meeting the club had 84 members. A quorum of 25% of the membership (22) is required to conduct business. Rob noted that at least 33 members were in attendance, so a quorum was present.

Rob introduced Bob Dodge and Howie Marshall as the Nominating Committee. Bob noted that the following directors had terms that were expiring: Kevin Kane, Howie Marshall, Ara Jerahian, Al DiSabatino, and Maame Andoh. Kerry Kertes has previously resigned. All members of the club were notified of vacancies on the board asked to self-nominate if interested. Kevin, Howie and Ara indicated they would be willing to serve another term. From responses received from the membership the committee presented the following slate of directors with terms expiring in 2026: Kevin Kane, Howie Marshall, Ara Jerahian, Paul Howell, David Gay and Mike Simmons.

Bob asked if there were any nominations from the floor. There were none. Bob then asked for a motion to accept the slate as proposed. The motion was made, seconded, and by unanimous acclamation was approved by members in attendance.

Bob Dodge provided a Treasurer's report showing that the club was in a strong financial position and had recently established an endowment fund with \$10,000 in the hope to grow it to \$100,000 in future years so as to generate sufficient recurring income to help cover the club's overhead expenses.

Rob then briefly provided his Annual Report to the Membership that would be posted to the club website. Then Annual Meeting was then adjourned.

Rob then announced the Annual Meeting of the Directors for the purpose of choosing officers of President and Vice President. With 10 directors present there was a quorum. Notice of the meeting had also be given to all directors, as aforesaid, more than 14 days in advance of the meeting. Bob Dodge reported that the Nominating Committee polled the directors to see if there were directors interested in serving as President and Vice President. Both incumbents in those positions expressed a willingness to continue to serve. There being no other nominees, Bob presented the slate of Rob Burgess as President and Russ Pinizzotto as Vice President which was unanimously approved by the Board.

There being no other business the Annual Meeting of the Directors was adjourned.

Rob Burgess
President, SMA