

Southern Maine Astronomers  
Club Meeting  
February 6, 2025 7:00 p.m.

Attending were members Ron Thompson, Jim Coyle, Dave Crocker, Russell Pinizzotto, George Bokinsky, Craig Snapp, Bob Dodge, Dwight Burkard, Paul Howell, Kevin Berry, Greg Thorup, Marc Stowbridge, Anne Dobriko, Yves Feder, Greg Shanos, Bill Denig, Anita DeVito, Brad Irish, Bonnie Weissberg, Carson Hanrahan, Adam Lee, Dwight Lanpher, Jim Coyle, Paul Mueller, Al DiSabatino, Mike Green, Jim Hummer, Roy Reigel, Ara Jerahian, Gil Fraser and new members Jeff Smith, Art Salve and Matt Drotter, and Rob Burgess and two guests.

Rob Burgess opened the formal portion of the meeting and welcomed eight new members.

**Recent activities by members:**

- Russ reminded members of the planetary alignment best seen on the evening of Feb 24 at sunset where all eight planets will be in the evening sky. He also noted that the Winter Hexagon asterism stars contained all spectral classes of stars except "O."

**Announcements:**

- In the interest of time, announcements were deferred but to be reported in these minutes. They include:
  - The 2025 star party schedule has been finalized and is available on our website
  - Next club meeting is March 6, speaker TBD. The next Director's meeting will be Wednesday, Feb 19 at 7 pm, via zoom. Agendas can be obtained from Rob (rburgess250@comcast.net). Please vote for SMA on the Community Matters More contest sponsored by Bangor Savings Bank. The club could win an award of from \$1k to \$5k. (Community Matters More | Bangor Savings Bank) Knit caps with the SMA logo embossed into a leather tag were now available for \$25 from Paul Howell (howellrcp@gmail.com)
  - Maine Space Day will be held this year at Bath Middle School on Friday, May 2. If you'd like to participate contact Rob.
  - Jack Flynn of Harpswell has a nearly complete set (missing 6) of Sky & Telescope from its inception and will gladly donate them to anyone with interest. (jvflynn@jvflynn.com)
  - It's membership renewal time. Renewing now through the website is a simple and efficient way to remain a member of the club.

**Guest Speakers:**

Rob introduced club member Greg Shanos as guest speaker. Greg, a Doctor of Pharmacy, is an avid amateur astronomer, astrophotographer, meteorite collector and eclipse chaser. He has

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Deleted: and noted that membership has reached 121, the highest level in club history!...

Deleted: <#>Paul Howell noted he has been working on a project and utilizing information from the site Astometry.net and has found it very useful. ¶  
<#>Greg Shanos had a new ZWO S30 scope under his Christmas Tree. ¶  
<#>Rob reminded members that they could suggest speakers for future club meetings based on recent articles they've read, podcasts they've listened to, etc. ¶

Deleted: Rob noted that the 2025 star party schedule was under development but members should feel free to send out emails or texts to announce if they were doing some impromptu observing and inviting friends. ¶

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Deleted: The next club meeting will be Thursday, Feb 6, with member Greg Shanos providing a comparison of a variety of new electronic telescopes. ¶  
<#>Jeremy Wright and Dean Ostergaard are working on organizing and field testing equipment the club has for sale. As items are vetted notice of their availability will be posted on our website. ¶

presented talks to the club on several prior occasions. His topic for the meeting was a review of new electronic scopes with special attention to ZWO's Seestar line.

The meeting was re4cordedRuss Pinizzotto introduced the evening's format that will consist of shore presentations by club members, designed to provide some basic observing advice as well as updates on some major space news and observing activities within the club.

**Rob Burgess** provided some basic observing advice, highlighting the club website listing of dark sky sites in our footprint (and encouraging members to submit their favorites to supplement the list). Bringing additional layers of clothing (even on summer nights) was recommended along with waterproof footwear. Dark adaption was discussed along with the technique of averted vision to see fainter objects. Astronomical weather forecasting sites such as Astrospheric and Clear Sky Clock were recommended along with cell phone apps such as Stellarium and Sky Safari to help with navigation. Other tools such as SkyMaps and planispheres were encouraged. Finally, Rob explained how to turn a cell phone completely red for star party use, and other start party etiquette.

**Ron Thompson** provided a fascinating report on the Parker Solar Probe and its multiple Venus/Sun elliptical orbits, with each bringing the probe closer to the Sun. The last occurred on 12/24/24 when the probe flew a mere 3.8 million miles above the "surface" of the Sun and survived unscathed. The mission was designed to better understand heat transference from the surface (6,000°) to the corona (1,000,000°) and properties of the solar wind. The probe is the closest manmade object to the sun and the fastest (reaching the speed of about 450,000 mph).

**Greg Shanos** reported on his participation in NASA-designed Parker Solar Probe Observing Challenge, that involves imaging the Sun before and after the closest approach by the probe and documenting the relationship of the probe to Earth as it made its approach. Greg identified all sunspots in his mages and found SolarHam.net a very useful source for the actual sunspot identifiers. Upon the submission of his work he will receive a certificate from NASA.

**David Crocker** is leading our solar observing group within the club. There are now 6 members. The group exchanges emails throughout the week with observing results, questions and advice. Why solar observing – David provided three practical answers: 1) It's a daytime event that doesn't negatively affect his sleep patterns. 2) Site restrictions are less of an issuing for observing. 3) It's dynamic! There are few other targets where you can see changes in real time. Plus, with hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy, we've got one right in our backyard that gives us life, so why not study it! People wanting to join the group can contact David at [dcc0444@gmail.com](mailto:dcc0444@gmail.com).

**Russ Pinizzotto** is leading the other observing challenge group in the club, designed to get members participating the approximately 80 observing challenges offered by the Astronomical League. The group meets via zoom on every other Tuesday night at 7pm. If interested in joining contact Russ at [zzotto@icloud.com](mailto:zzotto@icloud.com).

**Marc Stowbridge** described the Library Telescope Program which was started in New Hampshire by the NH Astronomical Society about 15 years ago. Marc introduced the program to SMA about

14 years ago and he was very praising of how SMA responded (primarily through the efforts of Ron Thompson, Forrest Sumner, Bob Dodge, and others). Maine has about 58 libraries participating with NH having about 200 telescopes in circulation. Nationally, all but two states (Mississippi and Hawaii) have libraries participating in the program. The program has even gone international, with nine countries involved including Switzerland, Portugal and South Korea. A challenge has been the demise of Orion Telescopes. However, Highpoint Scientific has come up with an alternative to the 4.5" Starblast reflector and Highpoint is even doing all the aftermarket modifications! For more information see [LibraryTelescopes.org](http://LibraryTelescopes.org) or reach out to Marc at [marcstow@aol.com](mailto:marcstow@aol.com).

**Anne Dobriko** offered several books she has enjoyed and found very educational in learning about astronomy: H.A. Rey's classic **Find the Constellations; Turn Left at Orion: The Observing Guide to the Messier Marathon; and Cultural Astronomy of the Japanese Archipeligo**. Howie Marshall suggested **The Perfect Machine** on the building of the Palomar Observatory. Russ Pinizzotto suggested the works of Steven O'Meara on the Herschel 400, the Caldwell objects, the Messier objects, and on Southern Skies. Greg Thorup suggested fiction: Perceval Lovell's **Mars** and **Exploration of Space** by Arthur C. Clarke. Rob Burgess recommended **40 Nights to Knowing the Sky** by Fred Schaaf. Greg Shanos recommended various titles on deep sky objects. David recommended the story on the building of the Palomar Observatory. George Bokinsky recommended **Orbital**, a well-researched fictional account of life on the ISS.

#### **Night Sky Tour** - Russ Pinizzotto

Russ highlighted

the [https://d.docs.live.net/853606b1b78fccf0/Documents/Robert/Documents/Southern Maine Astronomers/Meetings/Club Meetings/C](https://d.docs.live.net/853606b1b78fccf0/Documents/Robert/Documents/Southern%20Maine%20Astronomers/Meetings/Club%20Meetings/C) Hubble Space Telescope 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Observing Challenge – observation deadlines monthly in 2025 with a reporting deadline of January 31, 2026. <https://www.astroleague.org/nasa-observing-challenges-special-awards/>

- M 1 – Crab Nebula
- M 42 – Orion Nebula
- M 43 – DeMairan's Nebula in Orion
- M 78 - Reflection Nebula in Orion
- M 79 – Globular Cluster in Lepus
- C 46 – Hubble's Variable Nebula in Monceros
- C 73 – Globular Cluster in Columba (barely 6° above southern horizon for us)
- C 103 - Tarantula Nebula in Dorado (not visible here)

Various certificates will be issued based on whether a minimum of one or four of these are observed during the month, with the project completed after twelve months. February's targets have yet to issued.

Rob Burgess  
President, SMA