

skynews



in memoriam - Blaire Pellett

August 7, 2008 - It is with deep regret we announce the death of one of our members, Blaire Pellatt. Blaire died last night after having major surgery two weeks ago. He is survived by his wife Sanna, and their three daughters.

Friday August 15th – 7:00 pm - Evening Prayers at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, 2060 Haultain Street, Victoria (map)

Saturday August 16th – 2:00 pm - Funeral Mass at St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Reception to follow in the church hall.

You are invited to share your memories about Blair with his wife Sanna. spellatt@telus.net

The cover photo on this issue is Blaire sharing his enthusiasm for astronomy with a potential astronomer.

A message to our members from Sanna Pellatt

August 7, 2008 - I don't know most of you, but Blaire was very involved with your group and loved his astronomy. He had major surgery on July 22 to remove a large portion of his liver that had a massive tumor in it. He had not wanted to tell anyone about the upcoming surgery, so as not to worry anyone. He was going to let people know once he was recuperating at home. Unfortunately, there were complications following the surgery, and he slowly went downhill. He passed away peacefully yesterday at 11:50 pm, with our three young daughters and me by his side. We all loved him so very much. I wish I had spent more time with him looking at the stars, I know he is up there among them looking down on all of us.

Thank you for your kind words of support, they mean a lot to me and the girls. Blaire was a very special man and we will miss him so very much.

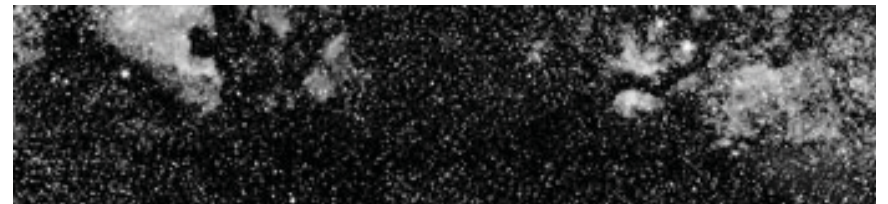


photo by: John McDonald

upcomming events

Official Opening of the Victoria Centre's Observatory

August 18, 3:00pm-4:30pm - Victoria Centre Observatory (VCO),
Observatory Hill, 5071 West Saanich Road - Northeast side of
Observatory Hill.

All RASC members and guests are welcome to attend the official opening of our new observatory. Our corporate partners and NRC staff are also invited to attend this event. Light refreshments will be available.

2008 RASCals Star Party

August 29-31 - Victoria Fish and Game Association
Holker Place, Malahat, BC

Cost: \$25 single and \$30 couple or family (max 4 children under age 21).

Friday 29th

12:00pm noon until dark - gates open, arrivals

7:00pm - Presentation - *How to improve performance of your telescope optics* - **Dr. Frank Younger, NRC-HIA** will help us better understand our telescope optics and how they can be improved.

8:00pm - Door prizes - main prize is an Acuter Spotting Scope, donated by Sky-Watcher. Winners must be in attendance to collect prizes.

Saturday 30th

Solar viewing - all day

1:00 pm - Astronomy Swap Meet

2:00 pm - Presentation - Astronomy Workshop - Various subjects on equipment and viewing techniques, details to be announced.

5:30pm-7:00pm - dinner time

7:30 pm - Presentation & Awards - *Next Generation Virgo Cluster Survey*- **Dr. Laura Ferrarese, NRC-HIA** will speak on her most recent research, letting us discover and understand cluster formation

8:30pm - Door prizes - Grand Prize: Celestron SkyScout ! Special Prize for volunteers that help us make this event possible - sign up and win.

For complete details see:

<http://victoria.rasc.ca/events/StarParty/Default.htm>

President's Report

President's Message July, 2008

As mentioned in my June President's message, I was recently interviewed by a local TV station about Virtual Observing using the WorldWide Telescope (WWT). This new free online service offered by Microsoft Research includes a slick planetarium program and sky tours, and it also offers online collaboration tools to allow anyone with a web connection to show others what excites them about the cosmos.



At the recent national RASC Council meeting held in conjunction with the General Assembly in Toronto, Council endorsed an initiative to take advantage of this new technology. RASC will host a WWT Community which will enable us to take astronomy to the public in new ways. If you browse the WorldWide Telescope website, you will see three Communities hosted by Astronomy magazine, Meade 4M, and Sky & Telescope magazine. I have volunteered to coordinate this effort on behalf of RASC. As I said to Peter Jedicke, the sponsor of this initiative, "We should be able to do that, and more!". RASC produces so much content that we can use online: the Journal, Observer's Handbook, and Beginner's Observing Guide, to mention a few. If we tap into the excellent photography our members from across the country are producing, and make use of other valuable resources produced by our Centres, the possible ways we can reach out to the public are virtually endless. I think RASC members will also want to join this Community, since it will reflect their society back to them in forms they have yet to experience.

RASC members have a long-standing history of taking astronomy to the people, and I think WWT is an evolutionary step forward which will allow us to participate in a new online experience. I think the public will find our Community to be both enjoyable and educational, and if we happen to sign up a few new members in the process, so much the better!

Speaking of taking astronomy to the people, the Technical Committee from the Observatory Project has put in extra effort to setup and configure our newly-purchased a Meade 14" SCT mounted on the Paramount ME in record time. We still need to purchase a few accessories to complete the package, but the telescope is producing very nice astro-photographs, as the Test Images show. The Victoria Centre Observatory is now operational - the Technical Committee members are hosting weekly observing sessions for Members Only on Wednesday evenings during the summer months from 9:00PM until 11:00PM. Feel free to come up and try out our new observatory. By all accounts, everyone is very impressed with the visual treats from our new gear.

If you are not already signed up to the RASCVic Email List (Members only), I would suggest you subscribe by sending me an email. Don't miss out on late-breaking events and opportunities to observe with your fellow members that often happen over the summer months.

Centre of the Universe

Star Party Themes

August 12 – 15: Perseid Week

Join us for a week of shooting stars as we celebrate the highlight of the summer sky - the spectacular Perseid Meteor Shower. Ask about our lawn-chair sit-in event.

August 19 – 23: Is There Anybody Out There?

In the past thirty years, new, extremely adaptable life-forms have been found in the most unexpected places on Earth. These creatures may hold the key to discovering life on other worlds.

August 26 – 30: Astronomy of Old Civilizations

Ancient observatories such as the pyramids and Stonehenge were designed to study the stars. The Mayan calendar, based on the stars, ends in 2012. The sky played an integral role in the daily lives of ancient people across all cultures - find out how.

September 5 & 6: Beauty and the Beast Move over Hubble meet James Webb...

The James Webb Space Telescope begins its mission in 2013 and the scientific community awaits with bated breath...find out why!

continued on page 11

2008 General Assembly

Report By Chris Gainor

Victoria Centre National Rep

The 2008 General Assembly of the RASC held at York University in Toronto from June 27 to 30th will be remembered both for decisions that moved the national society through a troubled period and for a program that featured a first-rate set of astronomical speakers.

The GA marked a first in that it was sponsored by three centres – Toronto, Hamilton, and Mississauga – rather than one centre. Among other things, the GA celebrated the centennial of the Hamilton Centre.

RASC Business

2008 has already been an eventful year in the history of the RASC in that a number of problems came to a head this year and were dealt with by the executive, National Council and the Annual General Meeting on the last day of the GA.

First, dues. RASC members at the AGM endorsed National Council's decision to raise dues by \$8.00 to \$67.00 a year to deal, once and for all we hope, with the national society's long-running fiscal crisis brought on by the loss of revenue from sales of the Observer's Handbook caused by the increase in the value of the Canadian dollar.

The dues will be divided with \$44.00 going to national and \$23.00 going to the centre the member belongs to. This division of fees is being formalized as a result of another crisis RASC national faced this year resulting from recent changes to federal tax laws that affect registered charities such as RASC national and the Victoria Centre. Funds cannot be shared as easily as in the past between a registered charity and other organizations, and so another motion passed at the AGM brings the RASC national constitution into line with Canadian law.

The organizational changes passed at the AGM are quite similar to the "decoupling" proposals voted down at the Montreal GA in 2002, but now the law requires these changes. The national executive and council, assisted by the Board Pilot Committee elected last year, helped bring the RASC through the difficulties caused these legal changes. More work needs to be done on questions such as the future status of life members of the society.

The AGM also passed a number of procedural changes, and heard reports about the new IMIS membership management computer system being installed at national office that will streamline procedures for membership renewals and purchases from the society.

National council was told that the experiment with the Board Pilot Committee will not be continued. While the committee, which was set up last year, gave a great deal of assistance to the executive in dealing with this year's many challenges, the committee did not succeed as hoped in streamlining the work of the executive and national council.

Council also got an update on problems at the national headquarters at 136 Dupont in Toronto. The building has had a tenant for a number of years and the rent has helped subsidize society operations. This year, the tenant's behaviour took a turn for the worse that resulted in his eviction from 136 Dupont that took effect during the GA. Before the eviction, the tenant caused damage to the building, including flooding of the basement, that forced the staff to move to a temporary location elsewhere.

Bonnie Bird, who has served as the RASC's Executive Secretary for 12 years, began her retirement at the GA with best wishes from members for her hard work. Bonnie has been succeeded by Jo Taylor, who has already become well known to members as she learned the ropes of her new job. As well, a new executive was installed at the GA, headed by President Dave Lane of Halifax. Dave actually took office in April when Scott Young resigned as national president before the end of his two-year term.

At each GA, RASC awards are given out, and this year the Victoria Centre's Gary Seronik won the Simon Newcomb for outstanding work in writing and communication on astronomy. Gary, who received the award in person, is well known to us all for his writing in Sky and Telescope and Skynews magazine.

Astronomy

While the 2008 GA dealt with a great deal of heavy business, astronomy remained front and centre. Through the business and astronomy portions of the meeting, there was a great deal of discussion of plans for the International Year of Astronomy (IYA) in 2009. Our own Dr. Jim Hesser gave the GA's keynote speech on the IYA, and his talk featured the

work under way in Victoria for the IYA. Among the other presentations and discussions, Victoria's Malcolm Scrimger made a presentation on his ham radio project for the IYA.

Other featured speakers included author and editor Terence Dickinson and Phil Plait, famous for his website and book on "Bad Astronomy." Plait gave two highly entertaining talks, including one previewing his new book, "Death from the Skies." Among the many other speakers was the writer of this article, who presented an update on activities of the Canadian Space Agency.

Delegates also visited local observatories, the MD Robotics plant where the Canadarm was made, and the Ontario Science Centre, which is presenting "Facing Mars," an exhibition on the problems facing anyone who wants to visit the Red Planet.

The theme of the GA was "Astronomy Night in Canada," and as part of this hockey theme, a game of floorball took place. Malcolm Scrimger was a member of the Western All-Star team in the match. The GA dispensed with some traditions such as Murphy Night and the pyramid, and instead put on the first National Member's Night, which included many interesting presentations on astro-photography, equipment, and reports on trips to observatories in the United States. The organizers of the GA headed by Denis Grey did a tremendous job putting on the meeting.

Coming Up

Next year's GA will be different in many ways from previous GAs. Instead of being held in an urban area, the 2009 GA will take place in the Cypress Hills Inter-provincial Park and Dark Sky Reserve in Saskatchewan. The GA is set for August 13 to 16, 2009, during the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, instead of the usual May or June GA dates. This GA will celebrate the IYA by putting astronomy front and centre. More information is available at <http://www.rasc.ca/ga2009/index.shtml>. And in 2010, the GA will take place in New Brunswick.

contact us on-line

Web Site
New Members
General Inquiries

www.victoria.rasc.ca
newmembers@victoria.rasc.ca
info@victoria.rasc.ca

www.islandeyepiece.com
Ph: 743-6633



Island Telescope

Science Emporium

107-2690 Mill Bay Rd (near Thrifty's)

*New Location
Opening
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Telescopes, Spotting Scopes, Binoculars
Science Kits, Globes & Posters, Dinosaurs
Sea Creatures, Educational & Kinetic Toys
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observers group

RASC Victoria Centre and the NRC have signed a License to Use Land Agreement which gives members of Victoria Centre expanded access to NRC property on Observatory Hill.

If you are a member in good standing of Victoria Centre RASC, consider yourself an "active observer", and wish to take advantage of this opportunity, please send an email to the 1st or 2nd Vice President. More information on this program see: <http://victoria.rasc.ca>

address change? information incorrect

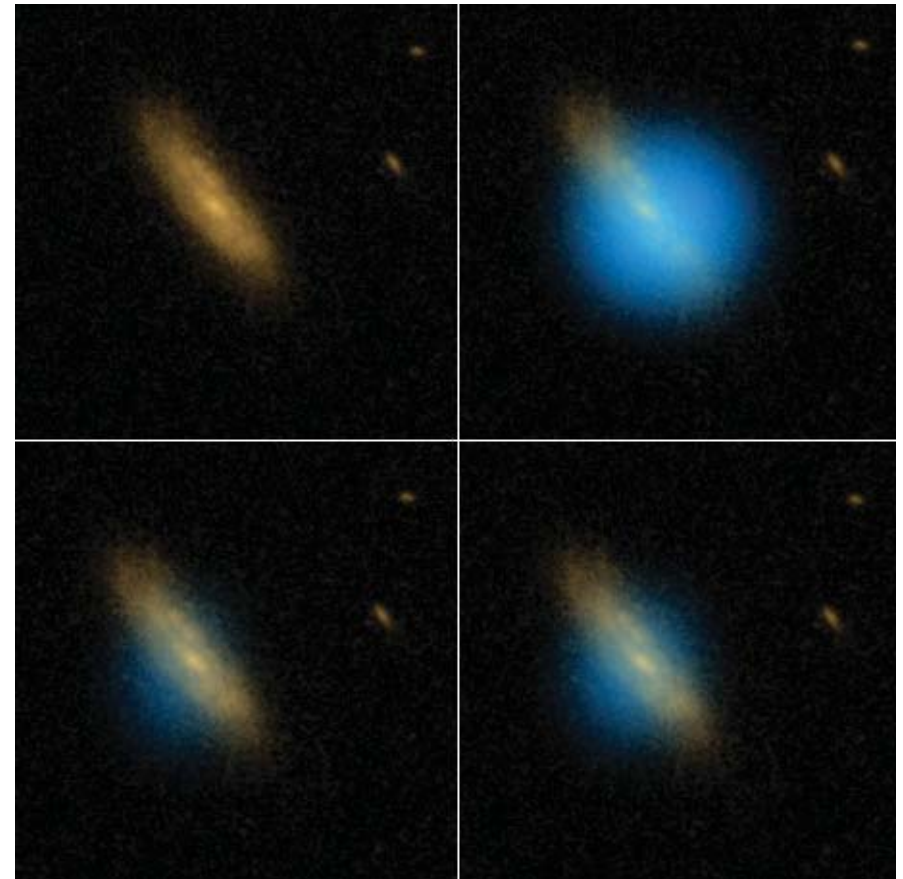
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Telephone - 416.924.7973 or toll-free in Canada 888.924.RASC
Fax - 416.924.2911
Email - nationaloffice@rasc.ca
Post - RASC, 136 Dupont Street, Toronto, ON M5R 1V2
General enquiries - nationaloffice@rasc.ca

Death of a Supergiant

By all outward appearances, the red supergiant appeared normal. But below the surface, hidden from probing eyes, its core had already collapsed into an ultra-dense neutron star, sending a shock wave racing outward from the star's center at around 50 million kilometers per hour. The shock wave superheated the plasma in its path to almost a

Sequence of images shows supernova start to finish. The top left image shows the galaxy before the supernova. At top right, the bright UV flash called the shock breakout indicates a red supergiant has collapsed. At bottom left, moments later, the flash is mostly gone. As the debris expands, it heats up again and becomes brighter (bottom right). The supernova became 10 times the size of the original over the following few days, thus becoming visible to supernova hunters.



million degrees Kelvin, causing the star to emit high-energy ultraviolet (UV) radiation. About six hours later, the shock wave reached the star's surface, causing it to explode in a Type IIP supernova named SNLS-04D2dc.

Long before the explosion's visible light was detected by telescopes on Earth, NASA's Galaxy Evolution Explorer (GALEX) space telescope captured the earlier pulse of UV light — scientists' first glimpse of a star entering its death throes. "This UV light has traveled through the star at the moment of its death but before it was blown apart," explains Kevin Schawinski, the University of Oxford astrophysicist who led the observation. "So this light encodes some information about the state of the star the moment it died." And that's exactly why astronomers are so excited.

Observing the beautiful nebula left behind by a supernova doesn't reveal much about what the star was like before it exploded; most of the evidence has been obliterated. Information encoded in these UV "pre-flashes" could offer scientists an unprecedented window into the innards of stars on the verge of exploding. In this case, Schawinski and his colleagues calculated that just before its death, the star was 500 to 1000 times larger in diameter than our sun, confirming that the star was in fact a red supergiant. "We've been able to tell you the size of a star that died in a galaxy several billion light-years away," Schawinski marvels. "GALEX has played a very important role in actually seeing this for a few reasons," Schawinski says. First, GALEX is a space telescope, so it can see far-UV light that's blocked by Earth's atmosphere. Also, GALEX is designed to take a broad view of the sky. Its relatively small 20-inch primary mirror gives it a wide, 1.2-degree field of view, making it more likely to catch the UV flash preceding a supernova.

With these advantages, GALEX is uniquely equipped to catch a supernova before it explodes. "Just when we like to see it," Schawinski says.

For more information, visit www.galex.caltech.edu, "Ultraviolet Gives View Inside Real 'Death Star'." Kids can check out how to make a mobile of glittering galaxies at spaceplace.nasa.gov/en/kids/galex_make1.shtml.

This article was provided by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, under a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

RASC victoria council

this month

monday nights

President/Website Editor/Email Lists

Joe Carr
president@victoria.rasc.ca

First Vice President/ Telescopes / Schools

Sid Sidhu
vp@victoria.rasc.ca

Second Vice President

John McDonald
vp2@victoria.rasc.ca

Treasurer

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treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca

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Li-Ann Skibo
secretary@victoria.rasc.ca

Librarian

Charles Banville
librarian@victoria.rasc.ca

Skynews Editor/ Past President

Scott Mair
scottmair@gmail.com

National Representative

Chris Gainor
nationalrep@victoria.rasc.ca

Members at Large

Bill Almond, Sandy Barta, Dave Bennett, Jim Hesser, David Lee, Ed Maxfield, Colin Scarfe, Malcolm Scrimger, Dirk Yzenbrand

New Member Liaison

Bruno Quenville
newmembers@victoria.rasc.ca

Astronomy Cafe

Fairfield Community Centre,
1330 Fairfield, Victoria

Closed for the summer

**ASTRONOMY
CAFÉ**



second wednesday of the month

Monthly Meeting

Closed for the Summer

as sky and interest dictate

New Observers Group

Hosted by Sid Sidhu.
1642 Davies Road, Highlands.
Call 391-0540 for information
and directions.

by email

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