

First Light Lite

May, 2020 Edition

Jim Lynch – Editor

Message From the CCAS President

Again, let me begin with “be well and stay safe!” The COVID-19 pandemic hasn’t been easy to deal with for any of us, and I sincerely hope that we all can come through OK.

As mentioned last month, we can’t do business as usual, such as star parties at WSO, in-person lectures and meetings, and school projects. But we have been working, like many societies, big and small, to find online activity substitutes for the duration of the pandemic.

Our main tools will be the CCAS website and the teleconferencing package that we now have, called GoToMeeting. (This should be a familiar tool to many in academia and business. It is very similar to the somewhat better known “Zoom” software.) Both the website and GoToMeeting are easy to use, and in the case of the teleconferencing software, it allows people to interact via both voice and computer displays.

The website, whose older material has been updated over the last few weeks, had a target date of April 30th for final completion. That date has moved back, due to our putting more effort into getting our “virtual meeting” capability up and running. When the website finally is fully updated, it will have both its usual content (e.g. descriptions of the club and its facilities), and also some new content featuring astronomy related things that one can do, both indoors and in one’s yard. The outdoor activities that you can do by yourself will include: binocular and telescope viewing and photography, science projects with simple equipment (ala an initiative that we had hoped to start previously), and even spectroscopy (if you would want to invest a small amount for a diffraction grating attachment to your camera). The indoor activities will include: an updated list of interesting astronomy books, magazines and websites.

The First Thursday meetings/lectures, which were cancelled for April (while we were trying to figure how things might play out), will resume the first Thursday in May over our new GoToMeeting link. Both Hank Ricci and I will give talks about the DYHS student projects we mentored. The students who did the projects will all be invited to join in, which might be easier for them than coming to a physical meeting! As mentioned before, they deserve their usual yearly spotlight, and by going virtual, we can give it to them.

I should note that for this first meeting, which will be a bit of a test of our new online meeting capability, email invitations and passwords will only be sent to people that we (the officers of CCAS and board of CCAF) know well, and not our full First Light Lite mailing list. People that we aren't sure of will be sent an email next month asking how they know us (usually via contacts at star parties or STEM events), and if they are interested in joining the online meetings. My apologies for this slight inconvenience, but security is an issue for online meetings, and we would rather avoid the risk of "Zoombombing", as it is called.

If the first meeting goes well (including "lessons learned" by us as administrators), then we will try to invite some of our previously planned speakers and see if they would be amenable to giving virtual talks. I would note that both societies and academic departments have largely gone to this model, and indeed gotten better attendance than usual (due to avoiding physical travel), so I think our prospects are good.

Dome Repair and Automation Project

Let me repeat last month's update, as this month is basically the same. As with most everything else, the work on the dome repair and automation has been put on hold. Sandy Cashen has informed us that the WSO will be cleaned and disinfected by a contractor to DYHS, and Charlie Burke has covered sensitive equipment surfaces for that cleaning. We will finish cleaning and disinfecting those covered surfaces ourselves, before opening again to the public. This delays the plans for the dome that were discussed previously, but certainly doesn't cancel them.

STEM - How can we help out?

One demographic that has lost a lot of ground due to the COVID-19 pandemic is students. From grade school to grad school, being a student is their main occupation, and like far too many people, their occupation has been curtailed for the duration of this emergency.

Last fall, we had a rather good collaboration working with schools in the Werner Schmidt Observatory area, specifically: DYHS, Barnstable HS, Sandwich HS, the Sturgis Charter School, and the YMCA Achievers. Lectures, star parties, and other events were planned and on the books. And as with everything else, the pandemic drastically changed what was possible. Our “Plan B” for this is to get back in touch with the teachers and mentors, find out what their specific situations are, and then offer to do whatever we can do together online for the time being. High School students have always been welcomed to CCAS with free membership, and perhaps our online activities will be of some interest to them.

As one specific delay instance, the special guest talk by Dr. Sylvester “Jim” Gates, scheduled for March 16th, currently has a rain check for some time in the fall. In talking to Jim, our agreement was “when conditions have improved to where public meetings are allowed.” That may be a while, however. The “Proving Einstein Right” books he was going to sign for the various student groups at that talk at Barnstable HS are still safely stored there until that event. We’ll keep in touch with him to see how/when we can do things as soon as they are safely possible.

Upcoming Speakers (Via Internet for duration of C-19 pandemic)

Note: As mentioned, past May, we still are looking for further speakers for the 2020 schedule, if they are amenable to using the internet. If you are interested in giving a talk, or know someone who would be a good speaker, please contact Jim Lynch at jlynch@whoi.edu. Thanks!

May 7th, 2020

DYHS Projects

Speakers: DYHS Mentors (Lynch, Ricci)

This year, the projects consisted of two projects on globular clusters, one on solar rotation, three on astrophotography, and one on the Galilean moons of Jupiter. Jim Lynch and Hank Ricci will give online presentations on their students' projects on globular clusters and astrophotography. Invitations and passwords to log onto GoToMeeting will be sent the day before the meeting for security reasons.

Last Month's Speaker

The April physical meeting was cancelled.

April Business Meeting

The April physical business meeting was cancelled as well, but Society and Foundation business were both discussed online during the month. Much of the discussion was about: 1) having virtual meetings and 2) the future of the dome repairs/upgrade and PlaneWave telescope training.

Star Parties (Cancelled until public gatherings are again allowed)

After August until mid-June, we will (generally) have two regularly scheduled Star Parties each month taking place at 7:30 -10:30pm on the *Saturday* closest to the date of First Quarter Moon (about 7 days old). This is an increase from our old schedule of one per month in the fall, winter, and spring.

From June through August, we have three regularly scheduled Star Parties each month taking place on *Thursdays* at 8:30-10:30pm.

When the moon is near its First Quarter, the terminator (the line dividing light from dark) is favorable for viewing sunlight or shadow on the sides of craters. This time is also favorable for observing the dark side of the moon occult (visually cover) stars in the sky as the moon moves in its orbit. Depending upon the calendar, we may also be able to observe planets and other celestial objects.

Here is the schedule for “Star Parties” from May, 2020.

May 2020 - ?? (Cancelled until public gatherings at WSO are allowed)

POSSIBLE CANCELLATIONS for Star Parties (Under Normal Operation Conditions). Cancellations will be very rare since we have lots to do "inside" as well as outside. Even if the forecast is "iffy"; the Staff Leader for the night may elect not to cancel in case of possible clouds. If clouds arrive after staff and guests have convened, a virtual Star Party will usually take place indoors to include overviews of the sky for that night using computer simulations with our big screen TV, videos of interesting sky events recorded previously, demonstrations and/or training on the use of scopes and other equipment, and consultation/discussions on things astronomical, etc.

However, sometimes a solid forecast for overcast or rain or a storm will result in cancellation of a given Star Party. **IF IN DOUBT ABOUT THE WEATHER AND THE STATUS OF A STAR PARTY, CALL THE OBSERVATORY AT 508-398-4765 AFTER 7:45 pm.** No answer means the event has been cancelled.

Directions to Dennis Yarmouth HS and Schmidt Observatory

For information on the location of our Dome behind Dennis-Yarmouth High School, click on the purple button "Old Website" and once there, click on "Meeting Location" viewing the two maps that are there: external for the Dome, and internal to locate the high school library where meetings are held.

For meetings, drive in the south entrance road and go around behind the main building. Park in the lot about halfway down the building and go in the back door and turn down the hall to your left to find the library.

For Star Parties at the Dome, drive in the north entrance road all the way past the north side of the main high school building, through a gate, and on to park near our Dome.

H&K directions

Please be reminded that Gus Romano or his delegate host a dinner gathering for members and friends each CCAS meeting night (before the meeting) at the South Yarmouth Hearth & Kettle restaurant at 5:45pm; (the meetings begin at 7:30 at D-

Y.) The speaker for each meeting is always invited. Please join the group to dine and talk about all things interesting, including astronomy, each month before our meeting. The H&K is at 1196 Rt 28, South Yarmouth, about a half mile west of the Station Avenue/Main Street intersection with Rt 28 (stop light).