



The Monthly Newsletter of the Von Braun Astronomical Society

## VBAS Highlights for July

### Public Programs for July

Our next member's meeting will be held on Friday, July 20th at 7:30 pm. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 p.m.; they're open to the public and are free.

Planetarium programs start at 7:30 PM. Brenda Rogers will present a show on black holes on July 7, and Andrew Wilson will give a talk about measuring the universe on July 21. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$3.00 for Adults, \$2.00 for Children 6-11, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

### Monte Sano State Park Entrance Booth

Recently, the Monte Sano State Park has had an operator at the entrance booth on Nolan Dr. to collect entrance fees. If you are going to the Park for a VBAS event, please show the operator your membership card, and state that your destination is the planetarium. You should be allowed entry without a fee. Whether you are a member or a guest, park entry is free if you are attending a VBAS event.

### Concerts in the Park and Sidewalk Astronomy

See the Calendar of Events on page 4, for a list of the next two months of Concerts in the Park, which VBAS Sidewalk Astronomy volunteers will be attending.

### Dark Sky Progress Report

Richard Norman posted two reports on Dark Sky on page 4.

### Venus-Saturn Conjunction at Doug's Condo

John Young has a report on the observing event hosted by Doug Horacek, as well as pictures, on page 5.

### Open Observing Session

There will be an open observing session on July 14. See page 6 for details.

### Treasurer's Reports

Gena Crook's 2007 VBAS Budget compared to actual finances is on page 6, the NASA NAPI Grant accounting is on page 7, and the May 2007 Treasurer's Report is on page 9.

### VBAS Member and Board Meeting Minutes

Page 7 has the draft minutes of this month's Member's Meeting, and page 8 has the draft minutes of the most recent Board Meeting.

Steve Sloan

Via Stellaris Editor  
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***Deadline for August 2007 Via Stellaris submissions is Friday, July 27.***



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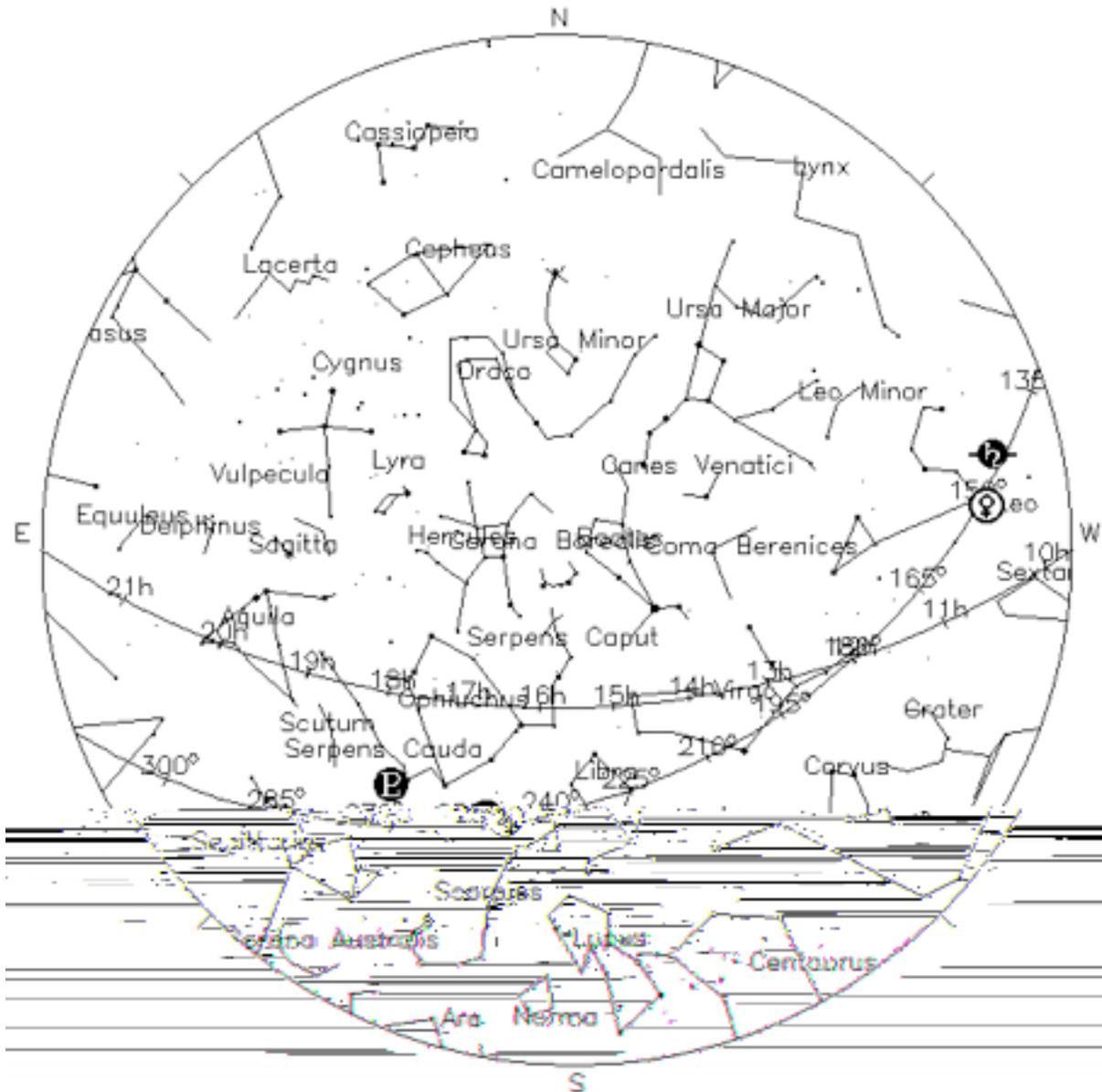
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## The Night Sky for July, 2007

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid July, 2007, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Saturn, the lowercase-h symbol, and Venus, the hand-mirror symbol, will be low in the sky, near Leo. Jupiter, the symbol like the numeral 4, is coming up near Scorpius.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



## VBAS Calendar of Events, July through August

*Monday, July 2, 2007, 6:30-8:00 PM*

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Concerts in the Park**

*Location: Big Spring Par"*

Come visit our volunteers, our Solar Telescope, and our 14" Meade, while you listen to the music of *Olde Town# Brass* and *Huntsvi! e Concert Band*.

*Saturday, July 7, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities.

*Saturday, July 7, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: Black Holes**

*Presented by Brenda Rogers*

What is a black hole? This program is a family oriented presentation on black holes. What are they? What causes them? Will our sun ever be one? Could it be a form of rapid transit? What would happen if you dove into one? For answers to these questions join us for fun family time studying black holes. Extra activities and hand-outs will be available for children and students.

*Monday, July 9, 2007, 6:30-8:00 PM*

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Concerts in the Park**

*Location: Big Spring Par"*

VBAS volunteers, telescopes, and the music of *Wing & A Prayer* and *The Starlight Gospel Singers*.

*Saturday, July 14, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Open Observing Session**

*Presented by John Young*

Get out from under the glowing blanket of the city lights, and enjoy night-time observing in VBAS' darker skies! We'll have a few larger telescopes in operation, but feel free to bring your own.

*Monday, July 16, 2007, 6:30-8:00 PM*

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Concerts in the Park**

*Location: Big Spring Par"*

VBAS volunteers, telescopes, and the music of *Band of Moose* and a military band to be determined. You'll also see a fireworks show celebrating Armed Forces Week.

*Friday, July 20, 2007, 8 PM-Midnight*

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

Come join us for our next Members' Meeting, which will be a *special event at Barnes & Noble on University Drive* to kick off our facility's 50th anniversary celebration between July and November this year! From 8 to midnight, we'll be a part of their "Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows" book release party, with a display booth inside electronically linked to our LX200R Meade outside. We'll have excellent news coverage, and it's an

exciting chance for us to inform the community about our recent facility upgrades, and what our society has to offer for those interested in astronomy. So please come join us for the fun, and help share your astronomical enthusiasm with the hundreds of kids and their parents that will be attending this 4-hour event!

*Saturday, July 21, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Committee Meeting and Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities, and attend this month's Facilities Committee Meeting.

*Saturday, July 21, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Planetarium Show: Measuring The Univers#**

*Presented by Andrew Wilso\$*

Our universe is a big place, so how exactly do astronomers figure out how far away things are? Join Von Braun Astronomical Society's *Andrew Wilson* as he describes some of the techniques used by astronomers to ascertain the values for distances to stars.

*Monday, July 23, 2007, 6:30-8:00 PM*

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Concerts in the Park**

*Location: Big Spring Par"*

VBAS volunteers, telescopes, and the music of *Rocke% City Chorus* and *Disc Oasis*.

*Monday, July 30, 2007, 6:30-8:00 PM*

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Concerts in the Park**

*Location: Big Spring Par"*

VBAS volunteers, telescopes, and the music of *Cristina Lynn* and *Island Soundz: Caribbean Band*.

*Saturday, August 4, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities.

*Friday, August 17, 2007, 7:30 PM*

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

Visitors are welcome at our members meetings!

*Saturday, August 18, 2007, 10 AM to 3 PM*

### **Facilities Committee Meeting and Working Party**

Help perform much-needed maintenance of the VBAS facilities, and attend this month's Facilities Committee Meeting.

...And as always, for the most up-to-date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at <http://vbas.org/events.cfm>.

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## Dark Sky Progress Reports

### Street Light to be Shielded

*by Richard Norman*

A local Monte Sano resident finally got a hold of the correct department at Huntsville Utilities concerning the street light which has been shining into their house. At the home owner's expense (\$50), Huntsville Utilities agreed to put up a shield similar to a sky cap, to redirect the light from the owner's property to the street. The home owner gladly paid it to keep the light out of their house at night. Although this does not save energy, it does redirect the light into a more productive direction. In order to get a full shade, you

will need the cooperation of your neighbors, or the utilities will only put up a partial shade to block the light from your yard. According to the recent newsletter, Huntsville Utilities is publicly owned (i.e., by us). The citizens have a voice via the Huntsville City Council, which appoints the board that runs the utility. The phone number for the Street Light department is 535-1324, and the point of contact is Jamie Patterson, 535-1370.

One Light down... Let's keep the momentum going!

### Dark Sky Park Status

*by Richard Norman*

The Alabama Solar Association's board of Directors voted to endorse the International Dark Sky Park project. Eliminating light pollution supports the ASA goals for energy conservation. They not only understood the safety hazards from glare to drivers, they informed me that glare is also a hazard to pilots. Glare hinders a pilot's night vision on approach to the airport, and the up light makes it difficult to spot warning lights and navigational lights amidst the sea of other lights.

The Astronomical League's Reflector newsletter has some good dark sky articles. They point out how it is important for astronomy societies not to rely on a single member to do all the dark sky work. It is important for multiple members to be involved, in order to keep the issue active and fresh. If you'd like to get involved, there are plenty of ways to help. Soos Weber and John Young are

helping with contacting other civic groups like ASA, but there are plenty more groups that need to be contacted. Even if you only contact a couple of groups it will help out, and will establish that the issue of light pollution is important to more than just one or two people. I've done some of the initial leg work by putting together an information packet and draft cover letter. All you need to do is customize the cover letter to the particular group, and follow up to see if they have any questions. The Crab Nebula, M1, is all but gone in the C16 telescope, the Dumbbell Nebula, M27, is fading fast, and even the Ring Nebula, M57, is washed out a lot of nights. Don't wait until they are gone completely to speak up. Being green is in, and folks need to know that eliminating light pollution is the green thing to do, and it puts green back into their wallet to boot!

## Venus-Saturn Conjunction at Doug's

by John Young

The peak of the recent conjunction between Saturn and Venus occurred on June 30th. Although the weather didn't look too promising, VBAS members Richard Norman and John Young faithfully and gratefully accepted Doug Horacek's invitation to the society to catch it at his home in Madison. Doug is fortunate to have an essentially unimpeded view of the western sky. That helped because the stated elevation of the two planets according to Sky and Telescope was only about 15 degrees above the horizon an hour after sunset. Angular separation was a little less



*Richard observes the conjunction.*

low around 10 p.m. Within minutes Saturn was all but gone and Venus followed its partner rather quickly into the murky night.

Thanks Doug for your warm hospitality (did I mention the pizza and root beer?), great conversation, and excellent westerly views!



*Doug (left) and Richard try to will the clouds away.*

than 0.7 degrees which is slightly larger than the apparent diameter of the Moon. Heavy cloud cover kept Doug's big 12" Dob inside, but brought out Richard's 10 x 50 binoculars and all of our eyeballs. Richard was the first to spot Venus' first break from the clouds at 9:40 p.m. with the unaided eye and was able to catch Saturn through the binoculars a few minutes later. We eagerly passed the binoculars around as the pair played hide and go seek through the clouds for about 20 minutes. Venus took on a rich, Saturn-like shade of yel-



*Doug borrows Richard's binoculars, to see the conjunction for himself.*

## Regular Open Observing Sessions at VBAS

by John Young

To increase observing opportunities for VBAS members and visitors we'll be starting low-key open observing sessions on selected Saturday evenings. The intent is to promote observing proficiency and enjoyable interaction among interested members by turning up some of the Society's scopes for familiarization, certification, and some good ol' fun with the night sky. Members are encouraged to bring their own scopes so that other attendees can have the opportunity to learn even more. We'll typically gather around twilight to setup and try to reliably get at least two hours of observing in. In an effort to not conflict with scheduled Saturday evening planetarium shows, we'll have the open observing sessions on selected "off weekends". Accordingly, the first session will be Saturday, July 14th at 7:30 p.m. up at VBAS. Future sessions will be posted on the calendar page of the VBAS website, the Via Stellaris, and via the observers mailgroup. Please contact me at 797-6038 or [jgy71@bellsouth.net](mailto:jgy71@bellsouth.net) if you're interested so I can better prepare and also coordinate any changes based on weather conditions.

	Partial Budget 2007 Feb. 1 to Jun. 30	Actuals 11-Jun-07	Remaining
<b>Income</b>			
Donations	\$291.67	\$155.55	-\$136.12
Interest		\$16.57	
Membership Dues	\$1,458.33	\$1,926.00	\$467.67
Program Fees	\$1,041.67	\$2,124.05	\$1,082.38
Food Sales	\$83.33	\$12.50	-\$70.83
Gift Shop Sales	\$291.67	\$326.00	\$34.33
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$3,166.67</b>	<b>\$4,560.67</b>	<b>\$1,394.00</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
Astronomical League Membership	\$333.33		
Liability Insurance	\$104.17		
Professional Fees	\$0.00		
Lease		\$1.00	
Newsletter	\$333.33	\$139.24	\$194.09
Phone	\$187.50	\$179.15	\$8.35
Website	\$125.00	\$134.75	-\$9.75
PO Box	\$30.00		
Awards	\$41.67	\$96.86	-\$55.19
By-Laws Mailing	\$0.00		
Postage	\$100.00	\$70.88	\$29.12
Printing	\$150.00	\$40.71	\$109.29
S&T Magazine	\$13.75	\$32.95	
Bank Service Charge	\$0.00		
USSRC Presenter	\$0.00		
Food Purchases	\$104.17	\$40.64	\$63.53
Gift Shop Purchases	\$41.67	\$92.85	-\$51.18
<b>Facilities</b>			
Supplies	\$104.17	\$75.29	\$28.88
Grounds	\$41.67	\$25.78	\$15.89
Buildings	\$709.00	\$546.10	\$162.90
<b>Total Facilities</b>	<b>\$854.83</b>	<b>\$647.17</b>	<b>\$207.66</b>
<b>Library</b>			
<b>Planetarium</b>			
Maintenance	\$352.08	\$350.00	\$2.08
Publicity	\$62.50		\$62.50
Speaker Honoraria			
<b>Total Planetarium</b>	<b>\$414.58</b>	<b>\$350.00</b>	<b>\$64.58</b>
<b>Observatory</b>	<b>\$333.33</b>	<b>\$378.56</b>	<b>-\$45.23</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$3,167.33</b>	<b>\$2,204.76</b>	<b>\$962.57</b>
Lawn Mower/Leaf Blower	\$1,500.00	\$1,534.46	-\$34.46

2007 Budget and Actuals, by Gena Crook

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## **VBAS Draft Member Meeting Minutes**

*VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM*

*Friday, June 15, 2006*

by Steve Sloan

President Jeff Delmas welcomed everyone to the meeting at 7:35 PM. The meeting was a potluck dinner, possibly the first annual potluck dinner. At the meeting, incoming officers will be introduced, and a raffle will be held.

### **Certificates of Appreciation**

Jeff expressed his appreciation for Gena Crook. She is leaving as Treasurer, but she is vital to our children's programs. The children's programs have reached over 2100 students, at 57 different schools. Jeff presented her with a certificate.

Jeff gave another certificate to John Young. Jeff had never seen anyone make as much impact so quickly. Jeff listed all the things John has done for VBAS, and praised his tireless enthusiasm.

Jeff read the list of outgoing and incoming officers, as well as the people staying in their current positions.

### **Raffle**

As Michael's last official act as Vice President, he ran the raffle. There were two prizes, a Star Atlas, and a \$25 gift certificate for the VBAS gift shop. Two VBAS members won.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 PM, followed by observing and conversation.

## VBAS Draft Board Member Meeting Minutes

*VBAS Planetarium, 7:30 PM*

*Monday, June 11, 2006*

by Steve Sloan

The board meeting was called to order at 7:37 PM. Board members present were Michael Cowger, Gerry Conrad, Gena Crook, Jeff Delmas, Steve Sloan, and John Young. Four board members are required for a quorum. Gerry Simpson, Dr. Philomena Grodzka, and Publicity Director and Treasurer Elect Sara Neale were also present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 PM.

### HATS Presentation

A representative from the Huntsville Association of Technical Societies (HATS), Dr. Philomena Grodzka, gave a presentation about the association's Science and Technology Education and Training Committee (STEDTRAIN). The Association formed in 1969. Their STEDTRAIN committee gives grants to teachers, so their students can participate in activities they ordinarily can't do. The grants usually go toward equipment. STEDTRAIN has given about \$200,000, and funded about 210 proposals to date. A teacher must fill out a simple three-page application to ask for a grant. STEDTRAIN meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 5 PM, at DMS Technology on Bob Wallace. Their web site is at [www.hats.org/STEDTRAIN/stedtr.shtml](http://www.hats.org/STEDTRAIN/stedtr.shtml).

After the presentation, Dr. Grodzka answered questions. The program is open to home-schoolers, but they haven't figured out a mechanism to interface with the home-scool system. They are a tax-deductible 501-3C organization. The biggest way VBAS can help is by providing volunteers to help with handling grants.

### 50th Anniversary Event

Michael said that the best approach is to bring it up to the members meeting, and ask the membership for ideas and suggestions. We are still targeting fall of this year.

### Restroom Addition

According to Gerry Simpson, the final drawings are not finished yet, but he hopes they will be done very soon. There's nothing the Board really needs to act on yet.

### Planetarium Projector Update

Walker County will definitely grant us the newer projector, in exchange for our current projector. In a previous Board meeting, \$1000 was approved for installation.

### State Park Mailbox

The park office gets mail for VBAS, and it stacks up. They'd like to assign one of their boxes (normally used by the campers) to us for free, to free up space in their office.

One person would have a key, and that person would have to check the mailbox every once in a while, to keep it from overflowing. Even though most of the mail causing problems is junk, the park office doesn't want to throw any of it out, because they don't want the responsibility of deciding what's junk mail, and what's not. We won't be changing away from the P.O. Box, but an additional mail box would be good. In particular, UPS and FedEx won't deliver to a P.O. Box. Gerry Simpson would be happy to pick up the mail at the new box. We'll want to appoint a specific person to do it, but there's no need for a Board vote about it.

### Radio Publicity

Sara met with a representative at Clear Channel about advertising on their radio stations. They wanted to know how much we want to grow, and who we want to target. They have four radio stations in town. They give discounts on advertising to non-profits. We give the price range we want, and the woman Sara spoke to will negotiate with her bosses. This advertising would probably still be relatively costly, even with the discounts. The commercials would be during traffic reports. The Clear Channel representative said they're there if we want them in the future.

Free alternatives exist, like UAH's Exponent newspaper, and public radio station WLRH. Sara needs a subcommittee to handle writing spots for WLRH. Writing spots for WLRH is really tough, because their list of rules is huge. According to Jeff, every commercial station is legally required to give some time to free public service announcements. We may want to be listed in Exponent events, rather than buy advertising space. Listing our planetarium shows in Go magazine has helped a lot with turnout.

### Officer Transition/Members Potluck Meeting

Sara Neale is coming in as Treasurer, Michael Cowger will become President, John Young will become Vice President, Jeff Delmas is moving to Immediate Past President, Eric Peterson will become Director of Facilities and Equipment, Melissa Snider will stay on for another term as Director of Education and Programs, and Gena Crook will leave as Treasurer to concentrate on children's programs.

We've never had any sort of swearing-in ceremony, but we'd like to introduce officers at the next members meeting. This will just be a ceremonial thing, because the official transition, per the Bylaws, won't be until July 1.

The next Members Meeting will be a potluck dinner. John is bringing fruit salad and pies, Michael is bringing barbecue, and Jeff is bringing chicken and dressing. In addition to the three tables we're borrowing from the state park, Melissa is bringing some tables. Gena will take a quick inventory of paper plates, plastic utensils, and plastic cups, to see if we have enough for the event, immediately after the board meeting.

Jeff is bringing a case of water. Should VBAS provide the drinks? That would probably be easier.

### Membership Secretary

Linda Farnell is stepping down as membership secretary, and Dennis Culver has agreed to replace her. Jeff tried to contact Dennis before the meeting, so he could be involved with the Board action, but he couldn't reach him. As President, Jeff accepted Linda's resignation, and nominated Dennis Culver. Michael moved to approve Jeff's appointment, Gena seconded, and the motion passed with no opposing votes. Dennis Culver is the new membership secretary.

### Treasurer's Report

Michael had a question about a \$400 grant expenditure, plus a big check for facilities. The total came out to about \$100 deficit, not \$320.

There is one more glitch that will show up on the books soon. Brenda Morrison did our taxes last year, and she filed them late, so we have a \$1600 penalty, except that we really don't, because we got a check from the IRS for \$1600 plus interest. When the penalty first came up, Brenda paid it for us from her own money, then we got the reimbursement from the IRS. We got to keep the \$16.32 in interest, after we paid back Brenda \$1600 even. Brenda considers the \$16.32 in interest a donation. We're now on the record that we owe nothing for this fee, but Gena keeps getting mail about it.

### Software Purchase

To keep things simpler, we would like Sara to use the same software that Gena used as Treasurer, to keep up with VBAS finances. Gena used Quick Books Pro 2003, which Sara doesn't have. Michael moved to have VBAS purchase Quick Books Pro 2003, or a later edition, for Sara. Quick Books Pro costs \$150 at Costco. Gena seconded his motion, and the motion passed with no opposing votes.

John moved to adjourn at 8:41 PM.

2:36 PM 06/11/07 Accrual Basis		<b>Von Braun Astronomical Society, Inc.</b> <b>Profit &amp; Loss</b> May 2007	
	<b>TOTAL</b>		
Ordinary Income/Expense			
Income			
donation /aquarium	\$5.00		
Food sales	\$5.50		
Gift Shop Sales	\$21.00		
Magazine Income	\$66.95		
Membership Dues	\$92.00		
Program Fees	<u>\$555.05</u>		
Total Income	<u>\$745.50</u>		
Gross Profit		\$745.50	
Expense			
Awards	\$96.86		
Buildings Maintenance	\$438.85		
Food expense	\$30.00		
GRANT expenditure	\$321.26	School Programs	
Magazine Expense	\$66.95		
Newsletter	\$32.24		
Observatory Maintenance	\$71.28		
Printing	\$23.65		
Supplies	\$29.61		
Telephone	\$35.99		
Website	<u>\$26.95</u>		
Total Expense	<u>\$1,173.64</u>		
Net Ordinary Income		<u><u>-\$428.14</u></u>	
Net Income		<u><u>-\$428.14</u></u>	

*May 2007 Treasurer's Report, by Gena Crook*

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### Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Steve Sloan at [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org). If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Vilaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

### Membership and Renewal

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership, and the dues for each, are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships will be renewed in March 2007. If you have sent us membership renewal money during the year, your membership has been renewed until March 2008. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Linda Farnell.

Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society. If your mailing or email address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary, Linda Farnell, at 534-5060, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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Von Braun Astronomical Society  
A Member of the Astronomical League  
P. O. Box 1142  
Huntsville, AL 35807-1142

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*Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor*