

# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

The Official Newsletter Of The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.

April 2006

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 NEB-STAR [www.neb-star.org](http://www.neb-star.org)

## Club Events

**PAC Club Meeting**  
 Tuesday, April 25, 2006

**Club Star Party**  
 Friday, April 28, 2006

**Astronomy Day**  
 Morrill Hall, UNL  
 May 6, 2006

**Mahoney Star Party**  
 Friday, May 19, 2006  
 Mahoney State Park

**Club Star Party**  
 Friday, May 26, 2006

**PAC Club Meeting**  
 Tuesday, May 30, 2006

## Program

**April Meeting: "PlanetQuest." Activities related to the search for Extrasolar Planets.**

**PAC-LIST:** You may subscribe to the PAC listserv by sending an e-mail message to: [imailsrv@prairieastronomyclub.org](mailto:imailsrv@prairieastronomyclub.org). In the body of the message, write "Subscribe PAC-List your-email-address@your-domain.com"

For example:  
 Subscribe pac-list stargazer@myISP.com

To post messages to the list, send to the address [pac-list@prairieastronomyclub.org](mailto:pac-list@prairieastronomyclub.org)

**Mahoney Star Parties**  
 May 19, June 16, July 14,  
 August 18, September 15.

**Nebraska Star Party**  
 July 23-28, 2006

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The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc. Membership expiration date is listed on the mailing label. Membership dues are: **Regular \$30/yr, Family \$35/yr.** Address all new memberships and renewals to: **The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc., PO Box 5585, Lincoln, NE 68505-0585.** For other club information, please contact one of the club officers listed on the last page of this newsletter. Newsletter comments and articles should be submitted to: **Mark Dahmke, PO Box 80266, Lincoln, NE 68501 or [mdahmke@4w.com](mailto:mdahmke@4w.com)**, no less than ten days prior to the club meeting. The Prairie Astronomy Club meets the last Tuesday of each month at Hyde Memorial Observatory in Lincoln, NE.

## Secretary's Report

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President Ron Veys called the meeting to order. There was 1 visitor. Ron discussed upcoming club events:

- The next club meeting will be Tuesday, April 25.
- The next club star party will be held March 31, location to be determined by weather conditions.
- The Mahoney Star Parties are scheduled for May 19, June 16, July 14, August 18, and September 15.
- The Beginning Astronomy class will take place in April 2006. The dates are Wednesday, April 5, 12, 19, and 26. Bob Leavitt reported that the class is now full.
- The UNL Student Observatory will be open April 21 and May 5.
- Astronomy Day will be Saturday, May 6 from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm. Jack Dunn reported that lunch will be provided to all volunteers. A Meade ETX telescope will be given away – donated by Astronomy Magazine. The speaker will be Bryan White, who will give a 3-D program on auroras. Volunteers are needed to bring telescopes and staff the booths.
- The City of Lincoln will rededicate Holmes Park on June 10 to commemorate the completion of the park renovation. This event will take place from 5 PM to 8 PM, followed by an observing session at Hyde.
- The Nebraska Star Party is scheduled for July 23 – 28.

Treasurer's report: Lee Thomas reported the following account balances:

Hyde checking balance - \$181.41  
PAC checking balance - \$800.29  
Hyde Savings balance - \$1939.41  
PAC Savings balance - \$11,612.03  
CD 1 - \$16,400.58  
CD 2 - \$3,628.13

Total - \$34,561.85

Ron and Mark reminded everyone that the PAC store is now open on [cafepress.com](http://cafepress.com). You can purchase t-shirts, hats, mugs, mouse pads, etc. with the PAC logo.

The PAC board held a meeting recently. One topic was plans for the annual banquet. We're going to try to have the banquet be self-supporting this year, without subsidies from either PAC or OAS. Last year PAC provided a \$250 subsidy to cover the cost of the room. We're looking for a new site that would be less expensive than the Riverview Lodge at Mahoney, which now rents for \$275. This will help keep the ticket prices at a reasonable level.

The board discussed liability insurance for PAC star parties. PAC has liability insurance, which covers damages done by PAC members to property at club events. The club does not currently have a way to protect private landowners from potential lawsuits by club members and guests attending star parties, should they decide to sue the landowner after being injured or receiving damage to their property. The issue becomes relevant when club star parties are held on private property such as Jim Kvasnicka's family farm. Bob Leavitt is working on a waiver form for club members to sign, which will address this situation. We're also looking at

posting a sign by the access road telling people to “use at your own risk”. This would be for guests who have not signed the waiver.

The board also discussed membership renewal policies. When a membership expires a renewal letter will be sent to the individual outlining the advantages of being in PAC and encouraging them to renew. Having some type of incentive for renewal was also discussed. Mark Dahmke developed the new renewal letter along with software to automate the letter generation process.

Ron reported that we have renewed PAC’s membership in the International Dark Sky Association.

Doc Manthey noted that additional signs are needed along the road in the park to better direct people to Hyde Observatory.

Erik Hubl reported that the City of Lincoln has a task force working on light pollution issues. They plan to have a draft of a new ordinance in the next couple of months. Both Erik Hubl and Martin Gaskell are on the task force. Comments and letters from PAC members are welcome, and will be very important in gaining clout for our position.

Hyde Observatory is open Saturdays from sundown to 11:00 pm (summer hours). If you'd like to help at Hyde, contact volunteer coordinator Dave Churilla. The annual Hyde volunteer appreciation dinner was held March 7. Volunteer-of-the-year awards were given to Mark Dahmke and Josh Machacek.

Ron reviewed upcoming observing highlights for the month of April.

The meeting was adjourned to the program. Jack Dunn presented the program “Visualizations of the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter”.

Submitted by,  
Bob Leavitt

## Club Telescopes – Checkout Policy

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To check out one of the club telescopes, contact Mark Dahmke (475-3150) or [mdahmke@4w.com](mailto:mdahmke@4w.com). If you keep a scope for more than a week, please check in with Mark once a week, to verify the location of the telescope and how long you plan to use it. The checkout time limit will be two weeks, but can be extended if no one else has requested use of a club scope.

## Hyde Observatory Volunteer Schedule

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Date	Team Leader	Operators		Supervisor	Events
<b>April</b>					
4/22/2006	Jeff King	Josh Machacek	Dave Hamiton	Steve Lloyd	
4/29/2006	Bill Wells	Bob Kacvinsky	Dave Brokofsky	Dan Delzell	
<b>May</b>					
5/6/2006	Bob Leavitt	Mitch Paine	Josh Machacek	Steve Lloyd	
5/13/2006	Jeff King	Joey Churilla	Jim Kvasnicka	Dave Churilla	
5/20/2006	Bill Wells	Bob Kacvinsky	Steve Lloyd		
5/27/2006	Dave Hamilton	Josh Machacek	Dave Brokofsky	Dan Delzell	

<b>June</b>					
<b>6/3/2006</b>	Bill Wells	Bob Leavitt	Jim Kvasnicka		
<b>6/10/2006</b>	Dan Delzell	Bob Kacvinsky	Joey Churilla	Dave Churilla	Waterfest-Solar viewing 5-7 PM
<b>6/17/2006</b>	Jeff King	Mitch Paine	Dave Brokofsky	Steve Lloyd	
<b>6/24/2006</b>	Dave Hamilton	Steve Lloyd	Josh Machacek		
<b>Summer Hours: April through September (Sundown to 11:00 PM)</b>					
<b>Winter Hours: October through March (7:00 PM to 10:00 PM)</b>					

## **March Star Party – Bob Leavitt**

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Last night's star party turned out to be rather good. Considering the weather conditions we had on Friday and earlier in the week, I was not expecting much. As I left Lincoln there was a good size cloud bank to the south and I considered turning around. But it looked like broken clouds so I kept going - and I'm glad that I did! When I arrived at Olive Creek Jim Kvasnicka, Bob Kacvinsky, and Dan Delzell were already set up. The clouds seemed to be breaking up and the wind had completely died down. Hey, this could be good! So I set up my LX50 on the concrete pad next to the other scopes.

It was one of those nights when passing cloud bands dictated what you could look at. But it was not like looking through sucker holes. Large areas of the sky were open for extended periods of time, and in those areas the seeing was quite good. Saturn provided crisp sharp views in all of our scopes. Cloud bands on the surface of Saturn and Cassini's Division in the rings were easy to see.

Dan brought his new 12" Meade Lightbridge, a really nice truss tube dob. He started off by showing us M81 and M82, and I saw the kind of details I wish I could see in my 8" SCT (sigh).

Throughout the evening we concentrated mostly on the Messiers, including M3, M35, M41, M42, M43, M46, M47, M51, M53, M68, M81, M82, and M104 among others. We also viewed the Double Cluster (NGC 869, 884), Stick Man (NGC 457), and several other open clusters. Bob Kacvinsky pointed his scope at some of the Virgo galaxies. The dew began to get heavy around 11:00 pm and we packed it in for the night. I was surprised at how many objects we were able to see on a night that started out looking very marginal.

## **Star Party Waiver Form—Bob Leavitt**

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Last year PAC began holding star parties on private property (Jim Kvashicka's family farm). The landowner is potentially liable for property damage or injuries that may be received by PAC members and guests while attending star parties. PAC has liability insurance, but it only covers damage that may be done by PAC members to property at club events. The club does not currently have a way to protect private landowners from potential lawsuits by club members and guests attending star parties, should they decide to sue after being injured or receiving damage to their property. To address this situation, the club has prepared a waiver form for members to sign (see below). Copies will be available at club meetings and on the PAC web site. Please sign the form and give it to any club officer.

Most guests who attend our star parties will not have signed the waiver form. To cover this situation we will post a "use at your own risk" sign by the road leading into the property.

### *Text of Waiver Form*

I hereby affirm that I and my family release the private property owners of the locations where PAC star parties are held (hereinafter referred to as the "Site Owners") from any and all injuries or damages received or sustained

arising out of or occasioned by use of the Site Owners' property during PAC star parties.

I further waive any claim that I, my heirs, assigns, or personal representatives, may have against the Site Owners for all accidents, injuries or losses I may incur while participating in PAC star parties. I agree to indemnify and hold harmless the Site Owners for any costs incurred (including attorneys fees) in defending any action brought against the Site Owners as a result of my participation in PAC star parties.

For PAC family memberships, my signature upon this form also indicates agreement and acceptance on behalf of all individuals within my family membership.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Financial Report for the Prairie Astronomy Club—Mark Dahmke**

As part of the audit process, the board thought it would be a good idea to provide a financial report for club members, especially for the benefit of new club members who might not be familiar with the history of the club.

The club maintains several checking and savings accounts. In addition to the accounts used for routine expenses, we have accounts that are used to sell items at Hyde Observatory, such as posters and star charts. Sales of these items have dropped off in the past few years, and we're having problems finding inexpensive items to sell, so the board has discussed ending these sales entirely. They produce very little income relative to the amount of work it takes to order and manage inventory. Currently the Hyde sales checking account contains \$181.41 and the Hyde savings account balance is \$1,939.41.

The club once owned an observing site about 25 miles south of Lincoln. By the late 1990s light pollution from nearby homes started to become an issue, and when the opportunity came along, the club voted to sell it. Proceeds from the sale are in several CDs and a savings account, and total \$31,640. At the time of the sale, the club decided to reserve these funds for the purchase or lease of another observing site, but no sites have yet been found that meet our requirements. The board feels that we should establish a formal policy regarding the possible use of these funds. Our defacto policy is that the principal should be reserved for 1) purchase or lease of another observing site, 2) educational outreach projects that advance the mission of the club, 3) purchase of equipment, such as a club telescope or other accessories. Any of these uses would require a vote by club members. The interest on our savings accounts could be used for these or any other purpose, but would also require a vote by club members.

We feel strongly that all regular expenses should be covered by income generated from dues and other sources, and that we should not access the savings accounts for routine expenses.

The following table shows income and expenses, and income from dues. Other sources of income and expenses are sales of club apparel, the club banquet, the Hyde astronomy class, interest, gifts and magazine subscriptions. In 2005 the club voted to increase dues by \$10, which is reflected in the dues column below. Our operating expenses increased due to higher insurance and Astronomical League dues.

	<b>Income from Dues</b>	<b>Total Income (incl. dues)</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>EOY Balance</b>
2002	\$1,136	\$2,671	\$2,582	\$89
2003	\$1,011	\$2,792	\$3,412	-\$620
2004	\$1,247	\$3,314	\$2,962	\$352
2005	\$1,240	\$2,745	\$2,469	\$276
2006 (to date)	\$465	\$960	\$308	\$652

The next chart shows annual “mandatory” expenses and operating costs, based on data from 2005. This list does not include discretionary expenses or expenses that do not recur every year, and doesn’t include pass-through expenses such as club apparel and magazine subscriptions, but is representative of our minimum required expenditures for the club to function. Printing costs have been reduced dramatically over the past two years as most club members now receive the newsletter through the website. We now typically mail only 14 copies each month.

Astronomical League	\$255
Insurance	\$350
IDA Membership	\$100
Postage	\$41
Printing	\$83
Secretary of State	\$30
PO Box	\$38
Misc.	\$36
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$933</b>

The PAC/OAS Banquet costs for 2005 are summarized here:

	<b>Expense</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Postage	\$37		
Lodge reservation	\$255		
Catering	\$402		
Total	\$694		
		\$410	
<b>Profit/Loss</b>			<b>-\$284</b>

Again, we feel that the banquet should pay for itself and not be subsidized. Therefore this year we have decided to change the venue from the rather expensive Mahoney Riverview lodge to either the main lodge at Mahoney (only \$140) or the Strategic Air and Space Museum, which has been offered to us at no cost if we hold the banquet on a Sunday evening. We will bring this matter to the club for a vote at the next meeting.

Last year was the first year we held the Introduction to Astronomy class through Lincoln Parks and Recreation. The total income was \$300, and expenses were \$40, plus Parks and Rec received their share of the income, \$60, for a net profit of \$200.

The mission of the Prairie Astronomy Club is to encourage the study of Astronomy and related subjects for the benefit of its members and the general public. Our goal and purpose as a 501c(3) non-profit entity is educational outreach. With this goal in mind, we would like to formalize our policies with regard to how we utilize the funds available to the club and how we allocate funds for routine expenses.

## Events Calendar

May 2006						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1  Sun: 18:24 - 08:22 May-Librids	2  Sun: 18:23 - 08:23	3  Sun: 18:21 - 08:24	4  Sun: 18:20 - 08:25 Moon close to Saturn	5  Sun: 18:19 - 08:26	6  Sun: 18:18 - 08:27 Astronomy Day; Hyde Observatory Open to the Public
7  Sun: 18:17 - 08:28	8  Sun: 18:16 - 08:29 Alpha Virginids	9  Sun: 18:14 - 08:30	10  Sun: 18:13 - 08:31	11  Sun: 18:12 - 08:32	12  Sun: 18:11 - 08:33	13  Sun: 18:10 - 08:34 Hyde Observatory Open to the Public
14  Sun: 18:09 - 08:35	15  Sun: 18:08 - 08:36	16  Sun: 18:07 - 08:37	17  Sun: 18:07 - 08:38	18  Sun: 18:06 - 08:39	19  Sun: 18:05 - 08:40 Mahoney Star Party; Mercury close to Pleiades	20  Sun: 18:04 - 08:41 Hyde Observatory Open to the Public
21  Sun: 18:03 - 08:42	22  Sun: 18:02 - 08:43	23  Sun: 18:02 - 08:44 Mercury close to Aldebaran	24  Sun: 18:01 - 08:44 Moon close to Venus	25  Sun: 18:00 - 08:45	26  Sun: 18:00 - 08:46 Club Star Party	27  Sun: 17:59 - 08:47 Hyde Observatory Open to the Public
28  Sun: 17:59 - 08:48	29  Sun: 17:58 - 08:49	30  Sun: 17:58 - 08:49 PAC Club Meeting; Eta-Aquarids	31  Sun: 17:57 - 08:50			

Moon phase images by: António Cidadão

**Directions to Olive Creek  
Observing Site**

Shorter:

Take Hwy 77 South out of Lincoln until you get to the Crete corner (junction Hwy 77 and Hwy 33). Go West on Hwy 33 (toward Crete) until you get to SW 72 St. Turn Left (South) on SW 72 St. and go about 5 miles until you get to SW Panama Rd. Turn right (West) until you get to SW 100 St. (SW 100 St does NOT go through to Hwy 33). Turn Left (South) on SW 100 St and go about 1 to 1 1/2 miles until you see the sign and entrance to Olive Creek (this is the West side of the Park). It's on your left (East) side of the road.

More Black Top:

Take Hwy 77 South out of Lincoln until you get to the Crete corner (junction Hwy 77 and Hwy 33). Go West on Hwy 33 (toward Crete) until you get to about SW 114 St. - the first intersection after SW 100 St. (forgot to look at this street sign, sorry - you'll see a sign for Olive Creek though at this road- but don't count on anymore signs after that, I didn't see any). Turn Left (South) on SW 114 St and go about 5 miles or so until you get to SW Panama Rd (you'll see a church and small school on your right). Turn Left (East) and go about a mile to SW 100 St, then turn Right (South) and go 1 to 1 1/2 miles until you see the Olive Creek entrance and sign (on your left hand side of the road).

**OFFICERS  
OF THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB**

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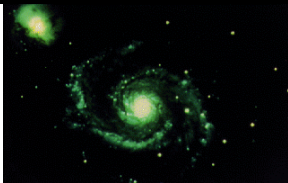
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**The Prairie Astronomer  
c/o The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.  
P.O. Box 5585  
Lincoln, NE 68505-0585**

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First Class Mail

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**Next PAC Meeting  
April 25, 2006  
7:30 PM  
Hyde Observatory**

«TITLE» «FIRSTNAME» «MIDDLENAME» «LASTNAME» «RENEWALDATE»  
«CAREOF»  
«ADDRESS1»  
«ADDRESS2»  
«CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»