TAAS CELEBRATED NATIONAL ASTRONOMY DAY with the third annual Cosmic Carnival in the Old Town Plaza on Saturday, April 18. TAAS partnered with the City of Albuquerque and their Founders Day Fiesta, formerly Fiestas de Albuquerque, to mark the 303rd anniversary of the founding of the city.

Twelve vendors attended the event and presented their programs to the hundreds of visitors to the carnival. A series of hands-on activities as well as solar viewing were the most popular attractions.

The highlight of the day was the drawing for the free telescope. Nearly 600 people signed up for the drawing. The winner was Nancy Terr, a teacher at Adobe Acres Elementary School. She said she wants to use the scope with her students. TAAS will assist her with this.

Thanks go to the following volunteers: Robert Williams, Judy Stanley, Elizabeth Burki, Pete Eschman, Joan and Neil Goldberg, Tom Grzybowski, Bob Havlen, Bob Hufnagel, Tyler Love, Carol Miller, Dave Pitonzo, Pat Rose, Mike Roth, Steve Snyder and Ric Thiem.

Nancy Terr, winner of the free telescope.

TAAS BOD member Dr. Dave Pitonzo and son Jesse.

More photos on pages 9 and 10.
Carnival of the Cosmic

IT HAPPENED AGAIN yesterday. Thousands of people descended on Old Town Albuquerque to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Albuquerque. What they experienced was a lesson in probability cleverly disguised as a game of chance. They experienced the torque of a spinning bicycle wheel and selected the best Martian landing site for a space probe. They viewed the Night Sky Network display of the planets and examined some simple rockets. Finally, many of them looked through a telescope for the very first time. What they experienced was a Carnival of the Cosmic. For the third consecutive year, TAAS coordinated the celebration of National Astronomy Day by hosting Cosmic Carnival.

Cosmic is one of those words that have been overused in our society. But for me, it does have a special meaning. To me, cosmic is something that is not a part of my normal life. For a Kansas farm boy, that was almost everything. We had no museums, television, or even a decent library. My world was expanded mostly by radio, an occasional magazine, and my imagination. No one was able to limit my thinking, stop my imagined adventures, or restrict my observations of the world around me, including the dark night sky on the farm.

I believe that imagination and curiosity are important. When the opportunity came for me to be exposed to new ideas, I was ready. Not because I was intelligent (the jury is still out on that subject), but because I was willing. I believe we all have a natural curiosity and, unless others stifle it, it prevails against the boredom and fatigue of our normal world. The prepared person will have new experiences and will develop a lifelong desire for and enjoyment in learning.

The Carnival of the Cosmic created a lot of learning around the Old Town Plaza. Hundreds of children observed new experiences with wide-open eyes. They have not yet been limited by our quick-answer, information-overloaded society. For many of them, the opportunity unfortunately does not occur often enough. But, for one afternoon, the opportunity to experience the cosmic was theirs.

Thanks to the many TAAS members who supported the endeavor. Your efforts will undoubtedly produce some future TAAS members who may someday also be a part of the Carnival of the Cosmic.

OBSERVE – EDUCATE – HAVE FUN

Night Sky Network planet exhibit.

Archaeoastronomy at Chaco Canyon

THE SATURDAY NIGHT OF MAY 2, 2009, the TAAS general meeting will feature Chaco Canyon National Park ranger G.B. Cornucopia’s presentation on the historical astronomical aspects of the Chaco culture. Ranger Cornucopia will examine how the inhabitants of Chaco Canyon used the night sky to maintain their culture.

G.B. is an amateur astronomer and TAAS member. He has spent over 30 years studying the archaeoastronomy of the canyon. The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. in Regener Hall on the UNM campus. Details of the meeting along with a map to Regener Hall are on the TAAS Web site (www.TAAS.org).
I AM NOW well into my ninth year as Observatory Director, with this being my one hundredth GNTO newsletter article! I have only survived in this job this long with help from a generous bunch of GNTO committee members, so my heartfelt thanks go out to them.

Over 40 people enjoyed our GNTO Spring Equinox event on March 21, including a good number of newcomers. Our event marked a rare convergence of calendrical timings, following the Equinox by only one day. I opened the facility and Steve Welch arrived early to take care of some maintenance tasks. Larry Cash was my backup for opening duties and also served as host for the Isengard telescope, with help from Gordon Pegue. We held a key-holder refresher course in the late afternoon, so that everyone could get up to speed on new aspects of running the facility and the Isengard telescope.

We picked out the Magdalena Ridge Observatory (MRO) far to the South Southwest. The bright dome, lit by the setting sun, was easy to spot in binoculars. Bob Hufnagel grilled most of the hamburgers and hot dogs, until Larry took over for Bob to grab some food for himself. With plenty of good food and conversation, it made for a great Picnic.

Dee Friesen conducted a well-attended training session, introducing GNTO, the Isengard, and loaner telescopes. Then Robert Williams took a large and enthusiastic group of folks over to the lecture area for a green-laser Sky Tour. Afterwards Larry used the Isengard to tour an impressive set of deep-sky objects. Steve had our imaging equipment running in the 10-foot dome, getting good images of M81 (NGC3031), M82 (NGC3034), M65 (NGC3623), M66 (NGC3627), and M1 (NGC1952).

Once observing began, we had eight telescope and four binocular setups including at least three with image stabilization. A number of observers spotted Comet Lulin lurking in Gemini, and many commented on how good Saturn looked with virtually edge-on ring system.

Weather conditions were a bit breezy early, with winds dropping later. Sky conditions deteriorated around 11 p.m., and we closed up by midnight. Thanks to Carl Frisch for smoothing the access roads. All in all, it was a very enjoyable event at GNTO.

We had a great Messier Marathon on March 28, with 50+ people and 35 telescopes and binocular setups in operation. (See photos on this page and on pages 9 and 10.) It was cloudless with no wind after sundown. Will Ferrell opened the facility and closed the next day at 6:30 a.m. Larry Cash served as backup for opening duties, and Bill Wallace hosted the Isengard telescope for all interested viewers. Barry Spletzer was on hand offering assistance in finding Messier objects, and once again, he provided a handy one-page checklist.

Ten hardy souls stayed the entire night and were rewarded with great marathon results. Kevin McKeown and David Pizonzo found all 110 objects using just charts and finder scopes. John Laning found all but one object using charts and finder scope, since he decided not to wait for M30 at daybreak. Gordon Pegue found all 110 objects using digital setting circles, as did Lance Hurt, who used his 15-year-old LX200 GoTo scope. Larry Cash found 86 Messier objects using charts and binoculars, with occasional object confirmation from his telescope equipped with digital setting circles. Eric Edwards used charts and finder scope to bag 68 objects prior to midnight. Eric said, “One very memorable view was of the cluster of nine galaxies all at once around and including M84 and M86. Another was getting to see Saturn and its moons in all their glory at what Ed Kist calls ‘silly power’ (400x and 600x) through his 18” f/4.5 Dob.”

After midnight, an immense meteor lit up the sky in the constellation Orion. As Will put it, “there was a great outcry among the participants as if the home team had hit a home run.” As the evening progressed, we had some nice views of Saturn’s moon Mimas, which was a hard challenge object at times.

Numerous compliments were heard about the fresh paint on the buildings, the immaculate grounds, and the well-conditioned road. The fresh paint is thanks to the efforts of our small but hard-working spring cleanup team. Thanks go out to Carl Frisch for the good condition of the grounds and road.

Our GNTO Committee Meeting on April 14 was attended by ten people, including Ariel Boston, Larry Cash, Ray Collins, Pete Eschman, Will Ferrell, Lance Hurt, Dale Murray, Gordon Pegue, Bill Wallace, and Steve Welch. We reviewed previous GNTO events, and filled in some assignments for upcoming events. I reported that a UHC filter has been purchased for use on the GNTO loaner scopes, and that a USB port adapter has been purchased for use on the Losmandy Gemini system. We thank Dan Richey for donating a 40mm 1.25” Celestron

Page 3
On Astronomy, Kids, and Science Projects

Bob Havlen

ON MARCH 20, four TAAS members attended the CENTRAL NEW MEXICO SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CHALLENGE to judge exhibits for the TAAS astronomy awards sponsored by Accent Windows. Science fairs are always such fun events! The young scientists proudly sit by their exhibits eagerly awaiting the judges’ attention. Most of them spend significant time researching and carrying out their experiments. Their enthusiasm is contagious. Some students have worked on their projects for multiple years, building up their confidence as they mature and explore. So it was with eager anticipation that our quartet read all the published exhibit titles and set out to hear directly from the students about rockets, rainbows, solar energy, wings, and UFOs.

These days, however, I am told that science fair projects do not merit much time in the school science curriculum. In my day, science projects were mandatory, and science fairs were on a Saturday when the school was overrun with budding Einsteins. Okay, that was the Sputnik era, and we were all pretty motivated, I guess. This year even though there were 600 participants at the UNM event, that was 30% fewer than last year. In the Senior category (grades 9 through 12) there were only 90 exhibits out of 32,000 high school students in Albuquerque alone.

So what does this have to do with TAAS? Astronomy is the science discipline with the most amateur involvement. Why, then, could we only find two Senior exhibits that were in any way remotely related to astronomy? This is the Southwest where the skies are always clear :-) There is plenty of excitement in the press about the spectacular results from Hubble and other space-based telescopes. Kids and parents bombard me with questions about black holes and planets (especially dwarf planet Pluto) and stars at all of our school star parties.

DO KIDS AND TEACHERS really think that all the interesting astronomy has already been done in the past? I thought that science projects were supposed to stimulate kids to be curious and try something different even if it is only “new” to them. In spite of the excitement and the interest, students are just not getting the message or the inspiration that making a telescope or looking at the sky, even if it’s on a computer, can be science project material and may even be fun.

Just think of all the neat observing projects that students could be doing: mapping sunspots, following the Galilean satellites, drawing craters on the moon, plotting the brightness of Algol or Mira, photographing constellations or unusual celestial scenes, locating sunset azimuths throughout the year, checking for zodiacal light, following asteroids, timing occultations, etc., etc. Each of you could easily come up with your own list.

Somehow, we need to get the message to science teachers and students that astronomy is for everyone. Astronomy is all around us and it’s fun, not just memorizing a bunch of boring facts. Tell your local schools that you are willing to help students who show interest in astronomy. Encourage teachers to apply to use one of the TAAS XILINX-sponsored telescopes. Invite students to attend a TAAS star party or meeting. Next year I want to see a dozen astronomy-related projects at the science fair.

Year-End Star Parties Offer Chance to Wow Students

Bob Hufnagel

THIS SCHOOL YEAR still holds the opportunity to participate in “the most exciting program in the TAAS inventory.” That program is TAAS’ school star-party program, widely considered the most effective form of TAAS outreach. Star-party volunteers enjoy great personal satisfaction in introducing the sky to young people.

NORTH STAR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL’s star party is at 7:00 p.m. on April 21. Who can resist a star party at a school named North Star? Being on the far north side of Albuquerque and with no moon that evening—it sets at 4:28 p.m.—this should be a fairly dark-sky location. As a Format #2 star party, we have indoor activities and outdoor telescope viewing. The Sun sets at 7:56 p.m., with the Moon high in the east and rising.

We’ll be at NORTH VALLEY ACADEMY on May 5, also starting at 7:00 p.m. This is our final school star party of this school year and your last chance to wow the students until next September. This is a full-blown Format #1 star party, with the Starlab Planetarium, indoor activities, and outdoor telescope viewing. The Sun sets at 7:56 p.m., with the Moon high in the east and rising.

VOLUNTEERS FOR EITHER star party will find their pizza and refreshments ready at 6:30 p.m. When you arrive at either North Star or North Valley, look for the TAAS telescope signs for directions into the parking area. As always, you can help by bringing your telescope for the night sky viewing or by helping out with the indoor activities. Please reply to me at education_coord@taas.org if you can help with either star party.

For maps and further directions, consult http://maps.google.com/maps or click on the map links below.

April 21
North Star Elementary School
9301 Ventura St. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122
Directions to the school are: Go north on Ventura from Paseo del Norte or Alameda to San Diego; turn west on San Diego and go past the gym.

May 5
North Valley Academy
7939 4th St. NW, Albuquerque, NM 87114

The Official Newsletter of The Albuquerque Astronomical Society
Donations to TAAS

General
DAVID BLAIR
UNITED WAY

Education
GOVERNOR BENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

GNTO
RITA VEIX

Dark Sky
ANGIE RICHMAN

Cosmic Carnival
JERRY HOLKESTAD
RICK HUDSON
JOHN KALTENBACH

Welcome to New and Returning TAAS Members

ED ISENBERG

Visit the TAAS Store online at www.taas.org

Note from Treasurer

Clarification of New Member and Renewal Policy
Renewal notices will be mailed out one month before expiration date. Renewals and new members will be dated on the first of next month no matter when during the month they arrive. This will help with the database reports and queries.

There will also be no grace period for renewals. Please make sure that you send in renewal information and your check before the expiration date. Renewal of magazines and new subscriptions will be sent in twice a month. All checks are to be made out to “TAAS”. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions or special needs pertaining to membership and/or magazine subscriptions, contact the Treasurer, Dan Clark at treasurer@taas.org.

Monthly Membership Report
April 2009

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Location, Location, Location

• Chaco Canyon
6185’ elevation
Latitude  Longitude
36˚ 01’ 50”N  107˚ 54’ 36”W
36.03˚ -107.91˚
36˚ 1.83’ -107˚ 54.60’

• Oak Flat
7680’ elevation
Latitude  Longitude
34˚ 59’ 48”N  106˚ 19’ 17”W
34.99˚ -106.32˚
34˚ 59.80’ -106˚ 19.28’

• UNM Campus Observatory
5180’ elevation
Latitude  Longitude
35˚ 5’ 29”N  106˚ 37’ 17”W
35.09˚ -106.62˚
35˚ 5.48’ -106˚ 37.29’

To convert from Degrees, Minutes, Seconds:
Divide seconds by 60, then add minutes, then divide by 60 again.
For security reasons, GNTO location is available by request only, so please contact Pete Eschman for GNTO information.

Membership Services

for:
• Membership Inquiries
• Events Information
• Volunteer Opportunities

Contact Membership at membership@taas.org

Editor’s Note

Please note that the deadline for the next issue of the Sidereal Times is Friday, May 22. Please e-mail text as an attachment, preferably in Microsoft Word or OpenOffice.org Writer. Please do not embed photos in text. Attach photos and illustrations separately. The e-mail address for the newsletter editor is editor@taas.org.

Contact Dan Clark at treasurer@taas.org

P.O. Box 50581 Albuquerque, NM
Astrophotography Boot Camp: Your First Assignment

Becky Ramotowski

JUST IN CASE you missed the article in the April *Sidereal Times*, I’ll be hosting “Astrophotography Boot Camp” three times this summer during the wildly popular Oak Flat star parties.

Boot Camps will be held May 30, June 27, and July 25 at the north end of the observing field. Try to arrive before dark so we can set up our scopes/tripods and start shooting as the sun sets.

Your first assignment before attending boot camp is to figure out how to turn your camera’s flash “OFF.” It’s the only assignment you have prior to attending, and if you can’t figure it out, come early so I can help you. Also, bring a small notebook for taking notes if you like. I will have some handouts that you can write on the back of if needed.

We’ll cover tips and tricks for digital SLR and point-and-shoot cameras plus CCD’s. Film is welcome, too; just bring whatever camera you have and come join the fun. We’ll have some homework and we’ll do a show-and-tell at the beginning of the second and third sessions in June and July to help monitor your progress.

The ultimate goal is to get attendees whipped into shape so they will have an extraordinary photo to enter in the TAAS Astrophoto Show in November.

Watch the TAAS.org Web site for maps and more info on the Oak Flat Star Parties. E-mail: Astrobeck (at) gmail (dot) com.

See you at Oak Flat!
**June 2009**

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**TAAS General Meeting**

*Saturday, May 2*

7:00 P.M.

Regener Hall

University of New Mexico

_(See map, back page)_

**Archaeoastronomy at Chaco Canyon**

G.B. Cornucopia, Chaco Canyon National Park Ranger

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**Notes**


Hotline 254-TAAS (8227).

GNTO = General Nathan Twining Observatory

GNTO Training = GNTO Observing and Training

GNTO NM = New Moon Premium Observing Night

UNM = University of New Mexico Observatory.

Call the TAAS hotline @254-8227, or the UNM hotline @ 277-1446 to confirm, or unm_coordinator@taas.org.

ATM = Amateur Telescope Making. Call Michael Pendley for information @ 296-0549, or atm@taas.org.

P & A = UNM Physics and Astronomy Building, Corner of Lomas and Yale

School Star Party

SIG = Special Interest Group

TBA = to be announced

_Blue Italic = Non-TAAS events_
Meeting Minutes

TAAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
April 4, 2009
University of New Mexico Regener Hall

MEETING MINUTES

Directors present: Melissa Kirk (Secretary), Dee Friesen (President), Gordon Pegue, Steve Welch, Pete Eschman, Dan Clark (Treasurer), Dick Fate (Vice President), Larry Cash, Robert Williams, Dave Pltonzo, Robert Hufnagel, Robert Havlen

Directors absent: Tom Davies (excused)

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

There are no corrections to the March Board meeting minutes.

Executive Report

1. As reported in the March 2009 minutes, earlier this year Tom Davies requested $2000 from Xilinx, Inc. for telescopes for teachers. Xilinx donated the funds, and Dee Friesen gave a status report about this program. Tom received a fantastic response from John Adams Middle School. Xilinx has asked TAAS to be the administrator for this program. In order to avoid over tasking ourselves, TAAS will select three or four teachers to receive telescopes this year. The letter about the program was sent to the teachers earlier this week. Dee received a passionate response from one teacher within three days from the time the letter was sent. The Board discussed ideas for program administration. There may be a workshop for teachers, and TAAS could work with parent-teacher associations. A process for selecting the teachers to receive the telescopes is in place. There should be a training program. The selected teachers would report to TAAS their activities relating to the program.

2. The 100 Hours of Observing event is going very well.
   a. There were 16 telescopes at the Telescope Amnesty Day event today at Explora Science Center. During the Telescope Amnesty Day event, someone from the Santa Fe Astronomy Club (SFAC) invited TAAS to the Pecos National Historical Park for an observing session. Karen Keese may organize a potluck meal in conjunction with this star party.

   b. There was a news conference in the Albuquerque Civic Plaza on April 2. Mayor Martin Chavez gave a proclamation that will be distributed, and Jim Palmer will frame.

   c. 125 to 150 people went to the UNM Campus Observatory last night.

3. Dee has raised $1100 for Cosmic Carnival. Expenses for this event so far are about $1000. 16 exhibitors have signed up. Since this is the third year TAAS has exhibited at Cosmic Carnival, the process for coordinating Cosmic Carnival has become more automated. The GNTO video imaging equipment may be operated for Cosmic Carnival.

Events Prospect

Gordon Pegue has been in communication with Mr. Bob Hill from the Amarillo Astronomy Club (AAC) about the possibility of a joint TAAS-AAC observing event. Larry Cash talked to a gentleman from Clayton Lake State Park about having an observing event there in May or June.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

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Get the most out of your observatory by hosting a Coffee Break at GNTO. We provide the coffee, hot chocolate, and any snacks you might want to share. We've got a bunch of great equipment waiting for you at GNTO, so plan your trip to GNTO soon.

UPCOMING EVENTS are

New Moon observing on April 25, observing on May 16, and New Moon observing on May 23. Next training at GNTO will be on June 13.

Steve Welch heads up our CCD imaging program. If you are interested in taking part in this program, Steve asks that you contact him at 505-866-7668 to make arrangements. Steve can have our CCD imaging equipment ready in the 10-foot dome, so you can learn about the imaging process and take some images of your own.

We will have the Robert Ortega Building open and our Guest Trailer available for coffee, hot chocolate, and any snacks you might want to share. We've got a bunch of great equipment waiting for you at GNTO, so plan your trip to GNTO soon. Why wait?

GNTO committee meetings are open to any interested TAAS members, and they provide a great way to get more involved with your observatory. We meet every other month at 6:30 p.m. at JB's Restaurant on Eubank just north of I-40. Our next committee meeting is June 25. If you have questions about GNTO, please contact me (Peter Eschman, gnto@taas.org, phone 873-1517).

I hope to see you soon at your observatory.
**Dark Sky SIG**

**Dark-Sky Week Observance Goes Global**

At press time on Earth Day, the seventh annual National Dark-Sky Week was in progress. It started on Monday, April 20, and will run through Saturday, April 26. The International Dark-Sky Association, the Astronomical League, and the American Astronomy Association endorse the event. This year, for the first time, the International Year of Astronomy 2009 is endorsing the effort as International Dark Skies Week and promoting it as part of its Global Cornerstone Project of “Dark Skies Awareness.”

It is a time for everybody to turn off unnecessary outdoor lights and revel in the glory of the night sky, which we are in danger of losing to light pollution from rampant urbanization worldwide. On a practical level, energy conservation, wildlife, and human health all benefit from darker nights. International Dark Sky Week draws attention to the effects of excess nighttime light and promotes the use of less-intrusive forms of lighting, such as fixtures that direct light downward.

When reducing nighttime light, the International Dark-Sky Association cautions the public not to turn off safety lighting. The association also recommends that dark-sky-viewers use a red-colored flashlight and stay with a group.

Jennifer Barlow originated Dark-Sky Week in 2002 when she was a high school student in Virginia. She states, “The only way that International Dark-Sky Week can succeed is if more people participate every year. . . . It is a great opportunity to . . . share in the wonder of the universe that has been a part of the human tradition for thousands of years.”

For more information, visit:
- National Dark-Sky Week: [www.ndsw.org](http://www.ndsw.org)
- International Dark-Sky Association: [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)
- IYA Dark Skies Awareness: [www.darkskiesawareness.org](http://www.darkskiesawareness.org)
- American Astronomical Society: [www.aas.org](http://www.aas.org)
- Astronomical League: [www.astroleague.org](http://www.astroleague.org)

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**2009 TAAS Messier Marathon**

The TAAS 2009 Messier Marathon kicks off at twilight with many observers scrambling to get a glimpse of M74 and M77 if possible. Photo: Eric Edwards.

Ready for sunset at GNTO. Photo: Bill Wallace.

Veteran observers Alan Scott, John Lanning, and Kevin McKeown (left to right) next to Alan’s home-built 16” ultralight Dobsonian. Photo: Eric Edwards

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**Seen at Cosmic Carnival 2009**

Jerry Cross and the Rocket Society

Welcome back, Steve Snyder

Ric Thiem, Steve Eschman

Top: Robert Williams, Carol Miller
Bottom (left to right): Judy Stanley, Jerry Cross. Kathy Jines, Dave Thomas

Photos: Dee Friesen
TAAS Help Wanted, May

TAAS NEEDS PEOPLE to assist with the following areas. If you are interested, contact Dee Friesen or any other TAAS BOD member. Contact information for all BOD members is on page 11 of this newsletter.

TAAS Mentor Program — Provide learning assistance to a newer member by sharing your astronomy knowledge and experience.

Contact Dee Friesen.

General Meeting Planning — Identify speakers, activities and events for the monthly TAAS meetings.

Contact Dick Fate.

Education — Participate in the TAAS Educational Outreach Program by attending school star parties.

Contact Bob Hufnagel.

GNTO Committee — Join the committee and receive training to become a GNTO Key Holder.

Contact Pete Eschman.

Membership — Assist with the conduct of the TAAS membership program. Help track membership, identify reasons for nonrenewal of membership, and promote TAAS membership.

Contact Dee Friesen.

Observing — Identify significant observing events for TAAS members and events to present to the public. Create observing contests and observing lists for members to complete to receive TAAS awards.

Contact Steve Welch.

TAAS Social Events — Assist with the planning and conduct of TAAS social events.

Contact Dick Fate.

TAAS Web Site — Assist with the TAAS Web site including e-mail procedures and other electronic communications.

Contact Mike Fleenor.

International Year of Astronomy planning — Assist with the planning of TAAS events for the IYA.

Contact Dee Friesen.

At Cosmic Carnival—
Our own alien! Bob Havlen.
Photo: Dee Friesen

At the Messier Marathon—
Barry Spletzer with his home-built 17.5" Dobsonian.
Photo: Eric Edwards
2009 TAAS Board of Directors/Staff

Dee Friesen  
President  
president@taas.org  
856-1593

Dick Fate  
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