



# The Albuquerque Astronomical Society

## Membership Guide

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### **About the Society**

Welcome to The Albuquerque Astronomical Society (TAAS)! The Society consists of people who share the enjoyment of amateur astronomy. The Society is a chartered, non-profit organization whose members include beginners, students, advanced amateurs, professionals and everyone in between. The Society maintains working relationships with the University of New Mexico (UNM), Albuquerque Public Schools, the US Park and Forest Services, New Mexico State Parks and the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science (NMMNH&S.)

Monthly general meetings are held at UNM or the NMMNH&S and feature talks by professional and amateur astronomers and other lectures related to astronomy. These meetings are open to the public and there is no charge. Time and location are specified in the monthly newsletter *The Sidereal Times* and on our website [www.taas.org](http://www.taas.org).

Our Loaner Telescope Program is one of the largest and provides telescopes for members free of charge.

The Society's own observatory, the General Nathan Twining Observatory (GNTO), is a first-class facility. It is located at a dark-sky site about an hour's drive from Albuquerque. GNTO includes two observatory domes, a bunkhouse, kitchen, and a large observing field with concrete pads for setting up individual telescopes. Use of GNTO by members and their guests is encouraged.

More detailed information about all of the topics discussed here is available at the society website: [www.taas.org](http://www.taas.org).

### **Membership**

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in astronomy or stargazing, regardless of level of knowledge. There are no age restrictions, and one need not own a telescope to join. Indeed, we encourage you to join, attend a few star parties, and use our Loaner Telescope Program before buying or making a telescope. Family memberships are available at a reduced rate. Applications are available online at [www.taas.org](http://www.taas.org). The annual fee covers the cost of Society activities. *The Sidereal Times* keeps members updated on meetings, Society news, observing sessions, technical tips and other articles related to amateur astronomy.

## **Activities**

The Society offers a wide range of activities, from social events to serious astronomical observations. These activities include:

- Monthly general meetings
- Equinox picnics, held twice a year at GNTTO
- The Perihelion Banquet each January
- Oak Flat Public star Parties, hosted by TAAS and the Forest Service (Sandia Ranger District)
- GNTTO Observing Nights, usually two per month around the time of the new Moon
- Cosmic Carnival, a public event celebrating astronomy and science
- UNM Friday night observing, hosted for the public by UNM and TAAS at the UNM Campus Observatory
- School Star Parties, where TAAS members bring the wonders of the sky to public school students
- Amateur Telescope Making and Maintenance (ATM) Workshops, held semi-monthly where members build their own scopes or keep scopes tuned up
- The Messier Marathon, an all-night observing event held on a Saturday evening in March or April
- Special Interest Groups (SIG) to support specific astronomy interests

## **Areas of Interest**

In addition to the specific activities described above, the following is a list of some areas of amateur astronomy in which you may be interested. Ordinarily, there are at least several Society members from whom you can learn and find out more.

- General stargazing and constellation lore
- Deep-sky observation (observing distant galaxies, clusters, nebulae, etc)
- Planetary and lunar observation
- Comet hunting and observation
- Meteor shower observation
- Variable and double star observation
- Solar observation
- Lunar or asteroid occultation timing (eclipses)
- Astrophotography and CCD (digital) imaging
- Telescope making
- Computer astronomy
- Starlab Planetarium – learning to run the Society’s mobile planetarium, used at school star parties and other public events.

Remember, you need not have prior knowledge or experience in any of these areas in order to become involved!

## **Public Service**

One of the primary functions of our organization (right up there with having fun and learning about our universe) is to bring astronomy to the public and to groups involved with education. The following are some of the ways we achieve this:

- Having general meetings open to the public
- Providing docents, planetarium shows, lectures, slide shows, astronomy exhibits, and demonstrations at TAAS public events and school star parties
- Providing docents for many local non-TAAS astronomy special events
- Serving as a source of classroom speakers, student mentors, and docents/telescopes for schools and organizations.
- Serving as a source of information for astronomical events through press releases to the local media

### ***Loaner Telescope Program***

The Society has one of the largest loaner scope programs with over two dozen scopes available to members. Members can borrow scopes on a month to month basis. There is no charge for this service. To borrow a scope, contact the Telescope Loan Coordinator ([telescope\\_loans@taas.org](mailto:telescope_loans@taas.org)).

### ***General Nathan Twining Observatory (GNTO)***

GNTO (General Nathan Twining Observatory) is TAAS's dark sky site located about one hour south of Albuquerque. The observatory is open at least one weekend night each month the around new moon, weather permitting. There is a one-acre observing field with concrete pads for member telescopes. Several portable telescopes are on-site for member use, the largest being a 16-inch Dobsonian. Two domes house equatorially mounted telescopes, a 16-inch f/6 Newtonian primarily for visual observing and a 14-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain primarily for imaging. A general purpose building is heated and contains bunks for napping. A separate café building is also heated and has a cook stove. It is the place for snacking or dining, and is often the conversation center. Electricity on-site is provided by a small battery bank charged by a photovoltaic array, and provides power for facility lighting, computers, and the drives of the permanently mounted telescopes. Power is not available on the observing field. Wi-fi is available on-site, however the bandwidth is limited so download and update programs prior to arriving on-site. Otherwise the site is somewhat primitive and is home to wildlife, including the occasional rattlesnake, so dress appropriately. There is no running water and the sanitary facility consists of an outhouse. The site is carry-in/carry-out. So, bring your own water and food and remember to remove all your trash. A map to GNTO along with the on-site rules may be obtained by contacting the GNTO director ([gnto@taas.org](mailto:gnto@taas.org)). Access to the observing field is via a locked gate. Any TAAS member may access the observing field any time by contacting the GNTO Director or a designated committee member in advance. Access to the buildings and equipment is further restricted to TAAS members who have had additional training. Any member interested in using the domes and equipment may attend one of the training sessions which are held on-site a couple of times each year. GNTO is supervised and maintained by a committee of dedicated TAAS members. The only requirement for committee membership is a desire to help with the operation and maintenance of the site. Contact the GNTO Director for additional information.