

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa (ASSA) was held on 25 July 2007 at SAAO, Cape Town, hosted by the Cape Centre. The reports of the various ASSA Sections were published in the August issue of *MNASSA*.

Minutes of the AGM

1. The meeting was opened at 20h15 by the President, Dr Dave Laney. There were over 30 members present.
2. The notice of meeting had been circulated to all members with the June *MNASSA*.
3. Apologies were received from W Koorts, T Cooper, C Rijdsdijk, B Fraser and L Labuschagne
4. Minutes of the last AGM were taken as read, having being published in *MNASSA*, and there were no matters arising.
5. The Report on Council was read by L Simone and will be published in *MNASSA*.
6. The reports of the Observing and other Sections were read, either by the directors of those Sections or various other members standing in for them. The reports will be published in *MNASSA*. The Imaging Section has only recently appointed a Director and no report was submitted for this AGM.
7. The Financial report was read by the Hon. Treasurer, Cliff Turk, and will also be published in *MNASSA*. The state of affairs remains healthy.
8. The report of the ASSA Scholarship was read by Mr MG Soltynski. It too will be published in *MNASSA*.
9. The ASSA Endowment Trust report was read by Mr Cliff Turk and will also be published in *MNASSA*.

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10. The Auditor, Mr RG Glass, was re-elected on the proposal of the treasurer, Mr CR Turk, and seconded by Mr MG Soltynski
11. The Secretary, L Simone, read the list of nominees for office and, as there were no conflicting nominations, the following were declared elected by unanimous agreement of the meeting.

President:	Mrs Magda Streicher
Vice Presidents:	Dr Peter Martinez Dr Dave Laney Mr Michael Poll
Secretary:	Mr Laurie Simone
Treasurer:	Mr Cliff Turk
Business Manager:	Mr Cliff Turk
Membership Secretary:	Mr Dudley Field
Council Member:	Mr Maciej Soltynski
Council Member:	Miss Patricia Booth
Council Member:	Mr Atze Herder
Council Member:	Dr Matie Hoffman

All remaining positions for Sectional Directors and other designated positions were filled and will be published in *MNASSA*.

12. After the break, Laurie Simone introduced the new President, Magda Streicher, to the attending members. Magda then invited the past President Dr Dave Laney to give his presentation.
13. The meeting closed at 22h00 ☆

Report of ASSA Council 2006/2007
Delivered at the ASSA AGM, 25 July 2007

1) Membership

As on 19 June 2007, there are:

Members	245	compared to 233 last year.
Full	99	
Honorary	10	
Limited	129	
New	7	enrolled and approved on 19 June

The above figures should be improved in 2007/8. The bug with the email address on the ASSA website has been removed and enquiries for membership have increased. The membership form has also been updated and posted on the website with the latest procedure to subscribe to *Sky & Telescope*.

2) Finance

Council would like to thank and commend Mr CRG Turk for his continued efforts as Treasurer and Business Manager. The accounts are in order and ASSA is in good financial health.

3) Council Membership and appointees

Mr Anthony Jones was reappointed as editor of *Sky Guide* and was also appointed to the Editorial Board. Mr Willie Koorts was appointed as editor of *MNASSA* and Mr Gerrit Penning continued as webmaster. Mr Case Rijdsijk resigned as Secretary and Mr Laurie Simone was appointed to fill the vacancy. Mr Case Rijdsijk was appointed Sectional Director for Education and Public Communication. Council would also like to thank all members of ASSA for their willing participation with the nominations for Council and the remaining positions for the 2007/8 year.

4) MNASSA

Council would like to thank Mr Willie Koorts for services as editor of *MNASSA*. At the Council meeting of 20 February it was announced that the Publication Board decided that *MNASSA* remains as is – as a hard copy and not electronic.

5) Sky Guide

Council would like to thank Mr Anthony Jones for services as editor of *Sky Guide*. *Sky Guide* was released for sale in November with an increased run of 500 to 4 000

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copies. Mrs Magda Streicher together with Mr Cliff Turk has set the wheels in motion to place *Sky Guides* with the game parks. This publication has gained popularity with each year and a bigger run is anticipated with the next issue.

6) Sections of the ASSA

Council would like to thank Mrs Magda Streicher and Mr Tim Cooper for the effort to initiate and submit a proposal to Council for an Observers Workshop. The proposal was well received, approved and tabled by Council. Unfortunately due to some last minute hiccups the Workshop was cancelled.

Initially both Natal Centres declined to hold the Symposium for 2008. Due to the efforts of Mr Brian Fraser and Mrs Magda Streicher the Symposium has resurfaced and it will now go ahead. A date for 2008 has yet to be confirmed.

7) The future Direction of the ASSA

One has to take some later correspondence into consideration of which an email from Chris Middleton was to the point. The subject has been debated long enough. There is not much more that can be said and unfortunately ASSA has been subject perhaps unfairly to a certain amount of criticism. Now we need to be pro-active.

8) Scholarship

Mr Maciej Soltynski, Dr Abe Mahomed and Mr Andrew Gray are thanked for their efforts in running the ASSA Scholarship. The scholarship was again awarded for 2007.

9) Lunar Eclipse, 3 March 2007

Council would like to thank Mrs Pat Booth, assisted by Mr Auke Slotegraaf, for their tremendous effort on organizing the photographic competition for the above event. This was a good public relations exercise as it involved all the Centres. Similar ideas for the forthcoming year would be welcomed.

10) 7th ASSA symposium

Congratulations from Council to the Bloemfontein Centre and Boyden Observatory for a successful Symposium. Sixty five people attended.

11) ScopeX

The best ever! Council would like to congratulate Lerika Cross, the Johannesburg Centre and participants for another successful ScopeX.

12) ASSA Website

Council would like to thank Mr Gerrit Penning for being an excellent webmaster. It is evident from email feedback that activity on the website has really picked up.

13) Acknowledgements

ASSA Council wishes to express their appreciation and thanks to the following: Prof Phil Charles, Director, SAAO for allowing the Council to use the Auditorium for its meetings and the use of other of the Observatory facilities, the Directors of the various Sections for forwarding data to their respective international bodies and for their support, and finally to all members of the various Centres, and especially the Cape Centre for hosting the AGM. ☆

Treasurer's Report for 2006/2007

Cliff Turk (Hon. Treasurer)

This year has been a period of transition following the increased costs of producing *Sky Guide* and changes relating to subscriptions to *Sky & Telescope*, but things seem to be settling down nicely.

The immediate difference from the previous year is that our funds in the Plus Plan account are down to R75 000 compared with R100 000 last year. However, this is explained by there still being just over R16 000 due to us for sales of *Sky Guide 2007* and that we have already made an initial payment of R10 000 towards the expenses for *Sky Guide 2008*.

Sky Guide continues to be our big revenue earner and regular orders for copies continue to increase every year.

MNASSA costs continue to exceed income but these are carefully controlled so that things do not get out of hand. During this year *MNASSA* content became available online and fees amounting to some R4 000 have been received subsequent to the year end. This is a very welcome contribution to our expenses.

As the year ended, changes were being made to the way in which our members can subscribe to *Sky & Telescope*. This will give the Society a small drop in income, but it will save a lot of work for the Membership Secretary as well as some time for the Treasurer.

Overall, our finances are healthy and the Society is in a good position to move forward into the future. ☆

Endowment Trust Report 2006

Cliff Turk (Secretary, ASSA Endowment Trust)

During the year the trust received R4 851.74 in interest on investments of which R2 500 was paid out as a grant to ASSA, leaving R2 351.74 transferred to the distributable reserve.

Capital at the start of the year showed a figure of R30 174.75 but this was inflated because it included a capital gain made last year but did not allow for the capital gains tax of R3 852.00 due. Thus the true opening capital

should have been R26 322.75.

During this year, donations of R6 178.91 have been received to bring the capital at year-end to R32 501.66. The distributable reserve is now R72 678.43.

The Trust received two requests during the year for assistance but neither of them was proceeded with. One may be revived in the future. ☆

Magda Streicher's Presidential inaugural address

As ons terugkyk op die afgelope dekade kan ons net verstom toekyk hoe sterrekunde verander het, danksy nuwe tegnologie. Ons beleef voorwaar 'n goue tydperk wat die professionele sterrekundige, asook die amateur, tot groter hoogtes gelei het.

Om as president van ASSA te dien is 'n eer en besondere voorreg. Sterrekunde is 'n wonderlike uitdaging en hierdie gedeelde passie van ons sal steeds groter motivering in die hand werk. Laatmate ons saam die nuwe jaar aanpak en kontak met mekaar behou. Hiermee gee ek derhalwe aan 'n ieder en elk die versekering dat ek sal poog om 'n waardevolle bydrae tot ons vakgebied te lewer. Ons en die sterreheemel is 'n vennootskap, 'n voorreg wat tydloos is.

Looking back over the past decade we can only stand amazed at how astronomy has changed, thanks to new technology. We are indeed experiencing a golden era that has taken both professional and amateur astronomers to greater heights.

To serve as president of ASSA is an honour and a special privilege. Astronomy is a wonderful challenge, and this shared passion will bring about ever greater motivation as we tackle the new year together and maintain contact with one another. With this I therefore give each and everyone the assurance that I will try and make a valuable contribution to our field. We, and the starry night skies, are a partnership, a privilege that is timeless. ☆

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**ASSA Presidents,
past and present.**

From left to right:

Dr IS Glass,

Dr CD Lancy,

Ms PJ Booth and

Mrs M. Streicher.

Photo:

A. Slotegraaf

centre reports

The Centres also held their AGMs and submitted their Chairperson Reports to Council. Five Centres, namely Bloemfontein, Cape, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria, sent theirs for publication in *MNASSA*.

Bloemfontein Centre

Gerrit Penning

The Centre's year successfully started with two public outreach programs in July 2006. One such program consisted of an astronomy open day in a bookshop located in the largest Mall in Bloemfontein, where members presented several short lectures on various popular astronomy topics. It was followed two weeks later by outdoor shows presented during the annual Arts Festival. It was heartening to see how members were more than willing to assist with these programs.

A major highlight for the year was certainly the 7th ASSA Symposium

organized by ASSA Bloemfontein in cooperation with Boyden Observatory. This national event took place from 28 to 30 September 2006 and was held mainly at Boyden Observatory as well as at venues within Bloemfontein city. The gathering drew an average of 68 astronomers from all over the country, amateur and professional. The theme was "Serious Amateur Astronomy: Linking with Professionals" and centred on ways in which amateur astronomers can contribute to the work done by professional astronomers. From post-symposium feedback it seems that the event was thoroughly enjoyed

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by its participants. The special overseas guest was Dr Patrick Seitzer of the University of Michigan. A report about the Symposium was written for *MNASSA* and a full write-up can be found on the Society's website. It is hoped that the momentum and enthusiasm created by the Symposium will be carried forward into the future. Boyden Observatory and the University of the Free State are thanked for their technical advice and the making available of their facilities.

Members of ASSA Bloemfontein continued to assist the Boyden Science Centre and the Friends of Boyden Observatory in its public outreach and educational programs. Members shared their knowledge about astronomy and space and performed roles as presenters, guides and telescope assistants during the observatory's open evenings.

Several observation evenings were held during the year, most consisting of informal deep-sky events, either at Boyden Observatory or other dark sites outside the city. Although not always overwhelmingly attended by members, these evenings were certainly very informative and enjoyable and played a large part in how members came to see the Centre and their hobby in astronomy. It seems though, that it is becoming more difficult to encourage people to go outside for observations. Light pollution, secu-

rity and the digital age (i.e. internet, software applications) are probably contributing factors. It also remains a challenge to coach beginners while at the same time fulfilling the needs of the more advanced members.

Although the Centre is quite active in general, there were very few amateur observations being performed that could potentially contribute to professional research. A lack of specialized members and too little motivation among members to take up advanced amateur astronomy play a role in this regard. Support from ASSA National towards training and facilitation will be appreciated.

Topics presented to members during quarterly meetings included "Global Dimming" (video), "The New Solar System" and "Astronomy Software".

Together with Boyden Observatory and the Friends of Boyden, the Centre played an important role in supplying the media and public with information about Comet McNaught in January 2007. Member Hannes Pieterse won acclaim and prizes for his photos of the comet and member photos appeared on several international websites such as *SpaceWeather* and *Sky & Telescope*. It was expected that the comet's apparition would increase member numbers to some higher extent, but very few new members joined after its appearance.

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At 30 June 2007, total club membership stood at 45 (one of the highest numbers on record). The year was marked by an immense increase in new members (18). Most of these new members joined after attending public astronomy shows and astronomy courses presented by the club.

The Centre's official newsletter to members, *Die Naghemel*, continued to be published intermittently. The Newsletter contained some excellent articles by Hannes Pieterse on the use of digital cameras for basic astrophotography and also served as a written archive of all the events and activities that took place in the Centre and in Bloemfontein astronomy. The Centre's e-newsletter to the public, *SpaceTides*, was sent out either monthly or bi-monthly.

Two highly successful courses were presented in February and March for beginners and existing members respectively, both taking place on Saturdays at Boyden Observatory. The beginner's course was attended by 30 people and served as an opportunity to orientate new members and to gain potential new members. The advanced course for members was very well supported and, according to members who attended, was one of the most enlightening courses presented in recent years.

The Centre's telescope making project culminated in a year which saw the most telescopes being completed by members since our first club visit to ScopeX in 2004. No fewer than eight telescopes were exhibited at ScopeX in Johannesburg in April 2007, owned by members Mia Zeelie, James Ross and Hannes and Thinus van der Merwe. Maurits van Wyk also completed a beautiful 8-inch reflector. James Ross should be commended for his leadership and expert hand in driving the telescope making efforts of Bloemfontein. A challenge now remains to convince a large number of non-members who are building telescopes to join the Centre.

In summary it was a busy year for ASSA Bloemfontein and its members. There were quite a few highlights and a number of successes. It is now time for a new leadership to take charge of the Centre's operations and I wish them the best of luck. Build forth on the solid foundation that has been laid in the past few years, but make sure that more than anything else, you enjoy astronomy as a hobby together with the other club members. As soon as you enjoy it as much as the others, anything you undertake is an automatic success! ☆

Cape Centre

Georg Mayer

We had a very busy year and managed to arrange activities that included not only talks on a wide range of theoretical and practical topics, but also excursions and a number of public “outreach” activities. Some of the highlights were:

The solar eclipse of September 2006 was itself “eclipsed” as a celestial event by the great Comet C2006 P1 (McNaught) appearing in January. It caused a hectic change of schedule and a lot of extra activities. What an experience sitting at Blouberg beach looking at the occultation of Venus which coincided with the visit of the comet and the great comet itself against the backdrop of Cape Town and Table Mountain at sunset! This was definitely the highlight of my astronomical life and will be difficult to beat. The comet gave us many opportunities for public astronomy on the beaches at Sea Point, Blouberg and elsewhere and we also had a club outing to Hout Bay to look at the comet together. The views of its beautiful, curved long tail during January had the general public and amateur astronomers all streaming to the best vantage points and also provided many opportunities for the photographers among us.

Talks by international speakers, including well-known author & telescope builder Richard Berry and Dr Noah Brosch (Tel Aviv Observatory) and by prominent local experts, including Dr Phil Charles, Prof Renée Kraan-Korteweg, Prof Michael Feast,

Dr Gert-Jan van der Merwe, Dr Jeff Murgan, Prof Patricia Whitelock and Dr Duncan Miller. Their topics ranged from cosmology to the Vredefort Dome, to the role of amateur astronomy and the National Astrophysics and Space Science Programme. Our invited guest speakers also included, among others, Case Rijdsdijk, Wayne Herschel, Wayne Traub, Kevin Govender and ASSA Deep-sky Director, Auke Slotegraaf. We also had numerous talks presented by our own members on topics ranging from comets to eyepieces, go-to telescopes, Tycho Brahe & Kepler – from “astronomy around the world” to satellite tracking, telescope building, and the “place of the solar system in the Milky Way & universe”. We also watched some DVDs and there were some practical demonstrations.

Our regular activities included assisting the SAAO during their monthly Open Nights and when the weather allowed it, our practical observing at Contermanskloof during our Dark-Sky evenings. This year our most notable dark-sky outing may have been our fun Mini Messier Marathon. We’ll do something similar in future, probably based on the ASSA Deep-Sky 100 list. Excursions included visits to the Cederberg and Sutherland Observatories and a club visit to the Planetarium, with a talk by Prof Anthony Fairall.

The partial annular solar eclipse on 22 September 2006 gave us the opportunity for public astronomy at the SAAO and

at the Canal Walk shopping centre in cooperation with the MTN Science Centre. Outreach activities included talks at other societies, talks at the MTN Science Centre for Astronomy Month and skygazing from the roof of the Canal Walk shopping centre, skygazing events at schools (such as Wynberg Boys, Herschel and Western Cape Academy of Science) and from Clifton for the KFM "Moonstruck" Beach party. We continued with the Stargazing at Kirstenbosch evenings – again, when the weather allowed us to do so. Our stand at the Hobby-X exhibition was once again very well attended. Setting up the exhibition and manning it was a team effort. Thank you to all concerned.

Fun evenings for the whole family included our year-end function where entries for our limerick competition became the main focus point, and a quiz evening.

We finally got a presence on the Internet with our website, where members can also download the *Cape Observer*. Among others, this method of delivery of the newsletter helps to save on postage. Our website has proven to be very popular and we received numerous e-mail enquiries from people who use it as a starting point for enquiries about amateur astronomy in general and our club in particular. We now also have a dedicated e-mail address and a telephone number that serves as an information service.

Thank you

Thanking people always means the risk of leaving someone out, but I wish to thank

everyone who helped to make our events for the year possible, in particular:

The SAAO, and especially Phil and Anne Charles for allowing us on site and the use of their well equipped auditorium. We are very grateful that some of the professional astronomers are prepared to give talks to Cape Centre and we are also thankful to the SAAO for hosting our web page and to Roy Emmerich for his assistance in this regard.

Isobel Basset and Cynthia Strydom have been extremely helpful: they are really the glue keeping things together regarding our contacts with the Observatory. Kevin Govender presented a talk and lends a hand in many ways: I won't forget him sitting with all the children on the lawn during the solar eclipse! Cedric's help for helping out with the nitty gritty stuff and keeping things in working order is also much appreciated.

Also thanks to the Iziko Planetarium and the MTN Science Centre for all their support, cooperation and collaboration as well as Mr Johannes Loubser of Fair Cape Dairies for allowing us on to his land for our Dark-Sky evenings. Similarly to the Cederberg Observatory for hosting us in November last year.

Special thanks to our committee and other members for all their efforts to make the above activities such a success. It was my pleasure and privilege to chair of the Cape Centre of ASSA for the past year and I wish the incoming chairperson and committee a successful year. ☆

Durban Centre
RS Bond

Our report starts on a note of sadness for, as you know, in April we lost a stalwart member, friend and Treasurer; Dennis Sargeant. Dennis was a member of the Centre for many years and for much of that time had been a guiding influence on the committee as chairman and later as treasurer. His knowledge and experience will be sorely missed. Dennis was a man of many outstanding qualities and achievements. We recognized in him his broad knowledge of the astronomical world but he was well known in the business world as MD of T-H. Many will remember his leading role as President of the SA Magical Society, but I think all of us will remember his infectious laugh which often would emanate from a room full of people, indicating that Dennis was present. However, the show must go on and we are deeply indebted to Logan Govender who has agreed to be co-opted onto the committee to prepare the Treasurer's Report and he has agreed to stand for election to the committee for the coming year. Thank you Logan.

I would also like to thank the members of your committee for another year of guiding the affairs of the Centre. Jessica has a demanding schedule at work, but nevertheless manages to record our activities and keep our affairs on track (as well as stepping into the breach as a main speaker where she spoke knowledgeably on the topic of Stellar Thermodynamics).

Belinda, editor of *Ndaba*, has continued to produce the newsletter and send them to those with email. Sheila Begg has again posted *Ndaba* to those members who do not have email and we thank her most sincerely for this chore. Unfortunately Sheila fractured her leg a couple of months ago and has been immobilized. We wish her a speedy recovery. I would also like to extend our thanks to Tony Akal and the Board of Marist Brothers for the continued use of their facilities for our meetings. There are of course many non-committee members who make a valuable contribution to the running of the Centre. Logan continues to avail us of his data projector and most importantly the expertise to operate it.

The membership of the Centre was 96 last July and is currently 84. The drop in membership was largely due to 'writing off' a number of members who had failed to pay their subs. Subsequent attempts to contact them were unsuccessful. On a more encouraging note, four new members have joined recently and several others have shown interest in joining after the AGM when new subs are due.

Speaker topics during the year covered a wide range of subjects ranging from the chances of getting hit on the head by a piece of space junk, South Africa's involvement with the International Polar and Heliophysical Years and a chat

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with Fred Hoyle through the auspices of a DVD. Once again Centre members gave the main speaker talks during the year and seven out of the total of eleven were presented by members. Outside speakers included Andrea Boattini, Prof Arthur Hughes and John Fielding. Future speakers include Prof Mike Watkeys, David Long, Rob Blore and Dr Axel Hofmann.

On 20 April, Martin Clements again invited the Centre to participate in the Star Party at the Botanic Gardens. This time the weather played ball and those visitors that were not carried away by the live music were able to view from several telescopes (including Ray's) that had been set up away from the lights. Apart from the main speaker for the evening, Prof

Mike Watkeys, Logan Govender gave a well illustrated talk on how a person with no previous astro-viewing experience could, within a short viewing session, learn to recognise over 200 celestial objects. Talking of viewing, Ray Field has restarted the regular viewing sessions at 18h30 onwards on the Friday following the new Moon. Thanks also Ray for your 'Eyepiece' contributions to *Ndaba*.

To end on an exciting note, ASSA has requested that the two KZN Centres host the 2008 ASSA Symposium and the Committee has accepted this honour. The committee will keep you informed on developments. It will be a great opportunity for members to contribute to the occasion and also interact with other enthusiasts from all over the country. ☆

Johannesburg Centre

Robert Groess

It has been another eventful year for the Johannesburg Centre of ASSA. When looking at the goals we had set last year (and some taken from previous years too), great strides have been made towards the realization of key elements that were placed on the agendas of committee actions gone by.

One of the greatest milestones that have been reached is the strengthened relationship we have built with our landlords, the South African Agency for the

Advancement of Science (SAASTA). As a direct result, we have been very fortunate in that SAASTA have graciously written-off past monies that were assumed to be owed to them by our Centre – accrued finances which have subsequently been earmarked for refurbishing of the 26" Innes refractor along with the dome building in which it resides. With the International Year of Astronomy coming up in 2009, there is an excellent potential to further strengthen our ties with SAASTA, who

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are also our official, non-commercial sponsor of ScopeX.

With the passing of one of our most esteemed members earlier last year, the committee also thanks the Estate of the late Jan Eben van Zyl, for making the largest monetary donation to this Centre to-date, for the sum of R20 000. The committee wishes to utilize these finances in a way which would be beneficial to our membership and in a way that would honour Eben van Zyl. No action has yet been taken.

That being the good news, we have not yet been in a position to properly address some of the shortcomings of the infrastructure on the Observatory grounds, such as the loss of power cables due to theft more than a year ago and general lack of maintenance of the telescope domes. This means that most of our equipment at the top of the hill remains paralyzed and this will no doubt be one of the pressing actions that need to be addressed by the new committee.

While developments on the Observatory grounds by SAASTA continue to be rolled out, these developments are currently only in their first phase which addresses the administration building (not used by our Centre) to the west of our meeting venue. While plans are in place to upgrade observatory-related infrastructure in good time, such plans are contingent on SAASTA acquiring

the relevant funding for such endeavours – something that remains out of our hands in any event.

On a more positive note, the 26-inch Innes Refractor has been retrofitted and upgraded by our own members and currently the telescope itself is in a position to be used for observing. Before this can be practically realized though, further progress still needs to be made, in particular, the insulators for the dome power slip-rings are in the process of being replaced. Without this, the facility would not be suitable for public viewing sessions. Similarly, the weatherproofing (flashing) also needs attention. These are technically building maintenance issues and thus fall under the umbrella of our landlords. Members of our Centre are in the process of refurbishing the dome as far as possible and we hope to have the telescope available for viewing at the September book launch by Dirk Vermeulen on the history of the Observatory.

One of the regular benefits the Centre provides to its members is the sourcing of guest speakers for monthly meetings. We have been fortunate to have hosted numerous speakers of high calibre over the past year with a wide spectrum of topics on astronomy and beyond. Meetings have generally been very well attended, averaging approximately 60 attendees. The list of guest speakers for 2006/2007 were as follows:

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Month	Guest Speaker	Topic
August	Prof. Fabio Frescura	Pulsars
September	Alex Fortescue	Satellite Earth Observations
October	Prof. Terrence McCarthy	The Story of Earth & Life
November	Gary Els	Rand Water
	Robert Groess	Rings of Andromeda
January	Dr. Percy Amoils	Backyard Astrophotography
February	Trevor Gould	The Pre-Solar Nebula
March	Gary Els	Sun Spots
April	Chris Middleton	W. Ursae Majoris Stars
May (Planetarium)	Prof. Richard Schilizzi	SKA - Cosmic Whispers
June	Claire Lee	The Dark Side of the Univ.

Membership for the year ending 30 June 2007 is summarized as follows:

Category	Number
Ordinary (incl. Family)	148
Pensioners	7
Students	1
Honorary	4
Gratuity	18
TOTAL	178

The feedback surrounding ScopeX this year has been very well received, with comments such as ScopeX being a truly "worldclass" event as judged by previous editor of *Astronomy* magazine and our ScopeX special guest this year, Richard Berry. Much is written on ScopeX in other reports and will not be echoed here.

None of this would of-course be possible without the unfaltering support of your committee members and all the hard work they put into this Centre.

Chris Curry, who initially doubled as vice-chair and webmaster continued with great groundwork on bringing our website up-to-date. Chris has also been very instrumental in re-furbishing parts of the 26-inch Innes refractor, a task which continues to be a work in progress.

Our Library continues to be run and operated in a professional manner and, with the help of the Johannesburg Public Library, the task of classifying our books according to the Dewey Decimal system have been completed. Our Librarian Alec Jamieson has also taken on the additional task of distributing the postal copies of *Canopus*, a task performed with equal dedication and integrity. Alec's big secret to success is his wife Sue, who no doubt contributes to much of the work performed behind the scenes, and on behalf of the Johannesburg Centre, a very big thank you to Sue as well. Assistant to the Librarian

(and possibly better described as our Archivist), along with being our council spy, Atze Herder has performed a very good job in sorting the library's collection of periodicals and magazines and has sourced missing copies while selling off duplicates in a very systematic fashion. Atze also performed the task of acting Treasurer during ScopeX with great fidelity.

While on the topic of Treasurer, we have been less fortunate with this portfolio this past year, as our elected Treasurer, Bruce Dickson has gone to greener pastures by immigrating to Canada a few months ago. Our previous Treasurer, Dave Gordon enthusiastically stepped in to take over (a task he had previously performed with a degree of excellence not seen before in this Centre), only to sadly become a victim of the violent crime that pervades this country. The committee has subsequently assisted in keeping our financial records on track and thanks to the very transparent ways in which Dave Gordon kept the books, were able to seamlessly augment them.

Amateur Telescope Making class representatives Chris Stewart and Keith Lou, (along with other trusty stalwarts) have undoubtedly contributed to the ongoing success of the class, details of which are to be found in the ATM report.

Curator of Instruments Dave Hughes and his assistants have been an invaluable source of wisdom and technical ex-

pertise in retrofitting the 26-inch Refractor with various components which had either degraded due to age or had been damaged in the vandalism incident last year. Furthermore Rodney Hyman has installed the electronics for the racklift in the dome and has also provided spectacular engraving on our speaker gifts.

Recently co-opted onto the committee, Kobie van Zyl has very graciously offered to host our website free of charge and has taken on the job of webmaster. This means our website is now hosted locally and not in some foreign country where internet delays are substantial at times, particularly with the uploading of new items by the webmaster. As with anything that wishes to remain at the cutting edge, our website continues to undergo a process of change (all with the intention of being for the better) and any feedback for the webmaster will be golden.

Someone who brings more balance to the committee than perhaps even she herself realizes is Sharon Tait, our very able PR and Media Liaison Officer, who also handles catering for our monthly meetings and special events in her stride without batting so much as an eyelid.

In my capacity as Editor of *Canopus*, I would like to collectively thank everyone who has helped me make the task that much easier by writing and sourcing topical articles locally and from around the world. *Canopus* celebrated

its official 25th year in existence in July and has in the meantime acquired some corporate sponsorship to cover the costs of printing the cover in full colour.

Lastly, and certainly not least, the gravitational force binding the committee

together in such a stellar fashion, almost all of you certainly know Lerika Cross, without whom, I do not know where we would be. Lerika performs far more than a secretarial role and it is a real honour to be serving on a committee with her. ☆

Pretoria Centre

Michael Poll

This has again been an active and successful year. The paid up membership for the period 2006/07 was 107.

Monthly Meetings

Monthly meetings have been held as usual on the fourth Wednesday of the month and still follow the format of previous years, with a "Beginner's Corner", "What's Up?" and a main topic.

In July 2006 Prof Okkie de Jager spoke about using gamma rays to measure galaxy formation, and in August Lorna Higgs explained how to observe solar eclipses and detailed what could be observed. In September Johan Smit revisited the Bennett Catalogue (of southern nebulae and clusters) and encouraged people to observe these objects as a project. In October Barbara Cunow showed us how simple apparatus could record deep-sky objects in a talk entitled "Astrophotography with a Small Camera". In November Andre du Preez discussed cosmic dynamics in "A cosmic window". January's main topic was presented by Johan Smit with a nicely illustrated talk

on "Stellar Evolution". In February Robert Groess gave us the background into the research that received world wide attention and which suggests that the Andromeda Galaxy has undergone a collision with M 32. March saw Prof Cor Rademeyer give us an insightful talk about Spectroscopy and in April Ad Sparrius was at his entertaining best with "Cubewanos, Alindas, Atens and Centaurs", which was a discussion about the groups of smaller objects in the solar system. In May Prof Andre Buys gave an analysis of the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci and in particular a diagram of what could have been a design of a telescope. Prof Buys showed us a beautiful telescope that he had constructed, based on da Vinci's drawings. In May Dr Chris Engelbrecht told us about neutron stars. "Beginners Corner" has been presented this year by Johan Smit, Michael Poll, Fred Oosthuizen, Dirk Wolmarans, Hein Stoltsz, Karl Crous and Jan Plomp. "What's Up?" by Wayne Mitchell, Johan Smit, Andrie van der Linde, Lorna Higgs, Hein Stoltsz, Tony Viljoen and Dirk Wolmarans.

The Centre thanks all these speakers for their contributions. Thanks to those people who chaired the meetings, and dutifully submitted reports to the newsletter. Thanks are also due to those who make the running of our monthly meetings a success – including Johan Smit for the digital projector and those who have offered such a projector as back-up, Wayne Mitchell for running the Library and Rynhardt van Rooyen for attending to the financial matters. We are, as usual, grateful to Christian Brothers College for allowing us the use of the Auditorium and classroom and in particular to Gordon Britz for arranging these facilities.

Monthly Observing Meetings

This report is similar to last year, except that there have perhaps been fewer cloudy evenings. These meetings continue to be well attended. We have had a number of visitors and visiting groups to the observing evenings, including a Voortrekker group in August and three visitors from the Johannesburg Centre in September. A number of Medunsa students came in February and were back for a further session the following week. In May a number of children from Laerskool Rayton, who were brought by Charl de Jager in celebration of Science Week, and some visitors from the Johannesburg Centre were present.

No formal log of objects observed is kept but as many as possible are recorded in the “Observing Evening Report” in the

newsletter. Some specific events that coincided with the observing evenings were: a re-appearance of Io from eclipse (18 August 2006); Comet Mc Naught (19 January 2007); and an early evening occultation of Elnath (beta Tauri) (17 May 2007). Thanks are due to Johan Smit for operating the Centre’s 12-inch telescope and for the maintenance of the instrument.

Activities during the year

A number of activities were mounted during the year. In general, presentations to other organisations are done by the Centre in the interests of the promotion of science and willing donations from the institutions go towards Centre funds.

Tswaing Crater; 26 August 2006

An overnight stay for Centre members at the Tswaing Crater was organised. Although only 13 people attended it was a very pleasant weekend. The crater was as impressive as ever and there was good observing in the western and northern sky. It has been suggested that we combine a visit with the Johannesburg Centre sometime in the future.

University of Pretoria Molecular Virology Group; 25 November 2006

This group held a weekend at Nylsvlie and requested the Centre to provide an astronomy evening. Michael Poll attended and gave a presentation. After the early evening thunderstorm cleared, stargazing proceeded until after mid-

night. About 20–30 people were present and the evening was well received.

Hoërskool Wonderboom South; 7 February 2007

Mr Lio Lombard from an organisation called Water Educational Techniques attended the January meeting and asked for assistance in giving science outreach programmes to schools. Andrie and Casper van der Linde and Michael Poll attended for an evening at the Hoërskool Wonderboom South. Three talks were given during the evening, only the last of which, by Louis Barendse, was about astronomy. The Centre representatives were there to do observing, but it had clouded over by the time the lectures had finished.

Dutch Reformed Church at The Reeds; 16 February 2007

Tinus Koekemoer invited the Centre to present an astronomy evening to the Church youth – the age group was 11–16 years. Michael Poll took a telescope and there were about 40-plus attendees.

Voortrekkers; 17 February 2007

Johan Smit gave a talk about “How a telescope works” to a Voortrekker group to assist them towards their Astronomy Badge. During the talk he built up a telescope of 5–10x magnification with spectacle lens sized elements.

Menlo Park Primary School; 21 February 2007

The Centre was invited to do an as-

tronomy evening at the school by the school Science Club. Johan Smit gave a presentation about the mechanics of the solar system and the relative sizes of stars. There was observing afterwards. About half a dozen centre members brought telescopes.

ScopeX; 21 April 2007

The Centre had an information table at ScopeX. Several members exhibited telescopes. Johan Smit is to be congratulated on receiving an award for his cleverly designed and beautifully constructed binocular mount.

Dark Sky Weekend; 15-17 June 2007

About 20 members and spouses with about 10 telescopes attended a dark-sky weekend at the residence of Mike Haslam and Joy Hodgson-Miles. The weekend was very successful with a superb dark sky (even better than Nylsvlei) and in lovely bushveld. Observing continued until midnight on the first night and until after 02h00 on the second night. It is noted that home-built telescopes outnumbered commercial ones. It is hoped that we will return to this venue for a similar weekend sometime in the future.

Thanks are due to all Centre members who supported these events.

Telescope Making Classes

The telescope making class is still very active as is shown by the number of telescopes completed and the prizes

achieved at ScopeX. Combining the class with the Johannesburg Centre has proven to be a good decision. There are six instructors involved in the class with Johan Smit actively participating since the beginning of 2005. With a total of 124 participants until May 2007, definitely makes it the biggest and busiest class in the country and probably one of the most active in the world. The Pretoria Centre can be proud to be associated with this venture.

Projects currently underway include: Fred Oosthuizen who has designed and built a caustic tester. Dirk Wolmarans has started on a Stevick-Paul design. Johan Smit is still busy with a 10-inch mirror and started on a 14-inch – he also designed and completed the award winning binocular stand, already mentioned. Percy Jacobs has completed his 6-inch as well as a 10-inch this year. Henry Viviers is busy with the final figuring of 8 and 12-inch mirrors. Hetta Pretorius is currently polishing a 10-inch mirror – her already completed 6-inch telescope achieved a special mention at ScopeX for an innovative focuser design. Surita Siebrits is doing the final figuring of a 6-inch the mirror, Louis Coetzer completed a 6-inch mirror on 14 July and is currently busy building his telescope. Danie Barnardo has completed a 6-inch telescope which was used at Warmbaths – he is currently busy making a 10-inch. Hannes Bronkhorst is currently busy with the final figuring of a 6-inch mirror. Charl Viljoen and

Pat Kuhn are grinding 6-inch mirrors. Gustav from Rustenburg is grinding an 8-inch mirror by remote instruction.

Committee

The committee comprised ten persons after the last AGM, but in 2007 Dirk Wolmarans and Wayne Mitchell resigned for personal reasons. The Committee met five times during the year. Thanks go to all the committee members for their support and for helping the Centre to remain active. As usual, finding speakers was one of the hardest tasks the committee faced. We are fortunate to have obtained quality outside speakers for the main topics and thanks are due to those committee members who were able to make contacts.

The Schanskop Observatory Project

A sub-committee under the chairmanship of Fred Oosthuizen is overseeing this project, which proposes to house a 14-inch telescope in an observatory at Fort Schanskop. The Centre proposal made to the City of Tswane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) to establish an astronomical observatory to be erected on the south-western section of the car park at the Schanskop Memorial (which is situated east of, and adjacent to, the Voortrekker Monument) has been agreed to. A proposed plan, architectural perspective and floor plan have been drawn up. The cost of the project is estimated at R700 000 and various ways of funding this amount are being investigated.

centre reports

The CTMM envisage incorporating the enlarged Southern City Gateway Nature Reserve and Game Park into a major tourist attraction. Day tours of the CTMM area will culminate in the park with night tours of the skies provided by the Centre. Although this commitment by our members will be onerous, it could also be to our advantage as this will be a commercial undertaking and therefore of long term monetary value to ASSA in Pretoria. With the large amount of interest now being generated amongst the general public and students in astronomy by the recent commission-

ing of SALT and the possible locating of the proposed European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT) at Sutherland, we as a group could play a vital role in furthering this interest in astronomy.

Thanks

Thanks which might not be mentioned elsewhere are due to Pierre Lourens for publishing the newsletter, to Neville Young and Johan Smit for assisting in the production; to Mauritz Geysler who has produced and maintained the Centre website and to Mike Haslam for the circulation by e-mail of *Astro News*. ☆

news notes

Two lunar-destined spacecraft

There seems to be a sudden flurry of interest in the Moon after decades of inactivity. Or is it pure coincidence that two lunar-destined spacecraft were scheduled to launch in September 2007?

One of these is China's **Chang'e 1**, named for a Chinese legend about a young fairy who flies to the Moon. Chang'e 1 is planned to be the first of a series of Chinese missions to the Moon. The satellite carries 24 pieces of lunar probe equipment, including a CCD stereo camera, microprobe instruments and a high-energy solar particle detector. It is destined to orbit the Moon for one year.

The second lunar mission is Japan's **SELENE** and **ENGINEERING EXPLORER (SELENE)**, nicknamed Kaguya. The primary objective of this 2-ton spacecraft with its suite of 15 instruments, is a global survey of the Moon, obtaining data on elemental abundance, mineralogical composition, topography, geology, gravity, and the lunar and solar-terrestrial plasma environments. Also to develop critical technologies for future lunar exploration, such as lunar polar orbit injection, three-axis attitude stabilization and thermal control. The mission consists of three satellites, viz: an orbiter containing most of the scientific equipment, a VLBI (Very Long Baseline Interferometry) Radio (VRAD) satellite and a relay satellite. ☆