

# The Custer Comment

★ *For The Curious* ★

**July-August 2008**

**Volume XXXVIII, Issue 5**

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[katz@scientific-consultants.com](mailto:katz@scientific-consultants.com)

**Brian Andrews, Esq '08**

(631) 725-1515

[bandrewsesq@optonline.net](mailto:bandrewsesq@optonline.net)

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## **Moon Imaged by Custer Member**

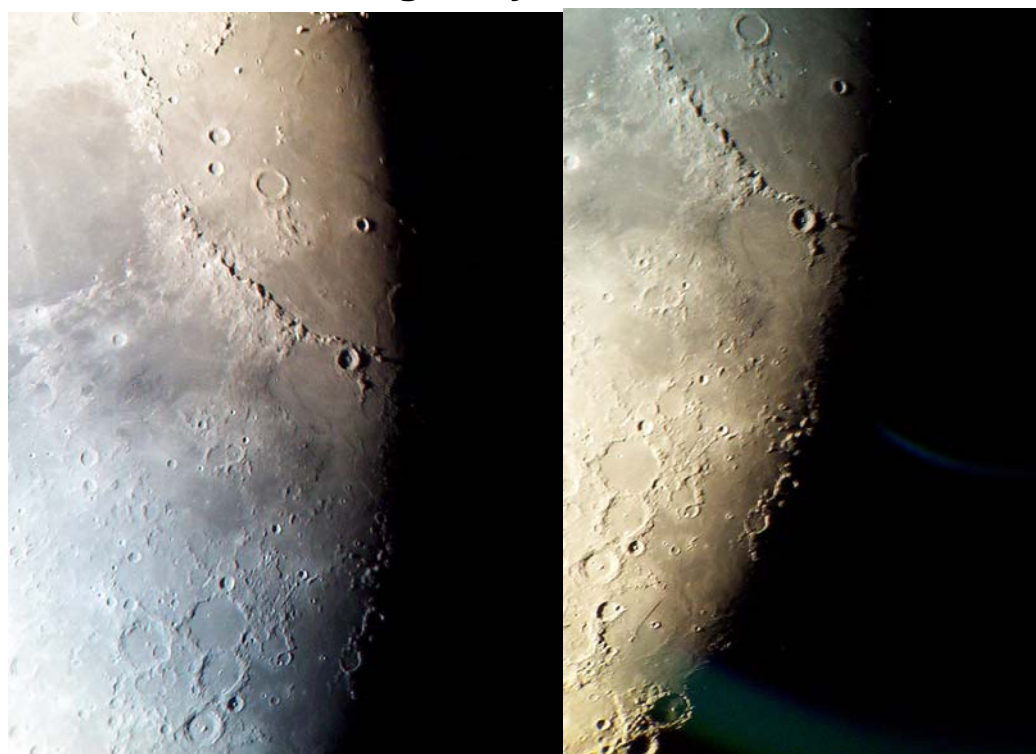


Image credit, Thomas Madigan

Images of the moon centered on Sinus Aestuum and Mare Imbrium showing the Apennine Mountains and the craters Eratosthenes, Archimedes and Timocharis as well as many others was obtained by this editor during the installation and commissioning of a Meade 16" Advanced Compound Cassegrain Reflector. Sub-kilometer size detail is visible in the original images.

### **Highlights for August 2008**

- An Evening With The Legendary John Dobson; Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2008
- Member's Night; Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008
- Saturday night concerts on 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August;
- Perseid Meteor Shower and public observing; Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2008
- Field Trip to Brookhaven National Lab

For additional details on these and other exciting events, please see inside

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### The Fields of Custer by Kurt Massey



Image Credit, Kurt Massey

A late spring portrait of flowers in bloom and fireflies in flight in the field to the south and east of Custer's main observatory

## Editor's Column

### Tom Madigan, Editor

Tom Madigan  
99 North Summit Ave.  
Patchogue, NY 11772-2226  
[tmadigan@optonline.net](mailto:tmadigan@optonline.net)

Cutoff for submissions is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding publication

Visit the new Custer Website at  
<http://www.custerobservatory.org>  
Custer Comment Archive:  
<http://www.tommadigan.net/custer>

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P.O. Box 1204  
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Southold, NY 11971  
(631) 765-2626

*"I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."*

*Sarah Williams*

*"The brilliant ones among us see things but darkly; they catch a notion, a fleeting glimpse, a brief insight, a hint that fades and flickers as a candle set atop a desert mountain"*

*T. Madigan*

Well here it is, dear readers, August! With the Perseid meteor shower coming up in less than 2 weeks and with the beautiful galactic center on the celestial meridian at astronomical twilight, we certainly know that we're on the leeward side of summer and that the Autumnal Equinox, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 2 days annually on which the sun rises exactly due east and sets due west, will be upon us in short order.

I've been the sole editor and producer of this esteemed journal for over 5 years, a period of time during which much change has occurred at Custer Institute. Custer has grown in leaps and bounds and is on its way to becoming a world-class organization under the diligent stewardship of Donna McCormick and Jeff Katz, 2 individuals who continue to put their heart and soul into the organization. We have a research arm through which we mentor senior high school students and undergraduate college students in an internship program. We continue to offer concise and in-depth programs and seminars for not-for-profit organizations given by experts in the field; we continue to offer seasonal Astronomy courses provided by world-class instructors; we've seen the breadth and scope of the programs and offerings increase beyond anything we could have imagined. Custer has, indeed, grown to much more than it was when I was appointed the sole editor and producer of the Custer Comment.

As students of astronomy and the natural universe, the one thing that we learn early on is that change and growth are the singular, undeniable constants that drive our evolving universe: our earth, formed from the churning eddies and currents of our nascent solar system, continues to evolve and change; our sun, eventually swelling to become a red giant star, will, over the course of the next billion-and-half years, continue to increase in luminosity, ultimately rendering the earth uninhabitable; our Milky Way Galaxy and the Great Galaxy in Andromeda are on a collision course with each other and will someday merge in a tumultuous exchange, the likes of which can only be imagined and is

fodder for contemporary science-fiction writers; through growth, change and evolution, our bodies, like the Phoenix, rise from the ashes of long-dead stars, formed from the heavy elements that, through one of the most elegant processes in all of nature, Stellar Nucleosynthesis, were forged deep in the cores of massive stars; through the terrible beauty of a supernova explosion, these heavy elements are dispatched to the interstellar medium providing the raw materials for the next generation of stars, planets and most certainly, life itself. Through our study, we come to realize that we are here because of change, the one constant in all of nature and that, my dear reader, brings me to a very important announcement.

Due to graduate studies, research and teaching commitments I no longer have the time to produce the Custer Comment and have notified the Board. A Publications Committee has been formed; it will be responsible for the production of the Custer Comment, as well as for the website. I have agreed to serve on that committee alongside its other members: David Cohn, David Van Popering, and Donna McCormick. I will continue to maintain and enhance all the electronic resources that have been available to the membership since I was appointed editor and producer of the organization's newsletter. Those resources would include the Custer Comment Archive, available at <http://www.tommadigan.net/custer> and any articles, multi-media files and links that are on the site. As well, I will still be available for lectures and other programs and will join all of you, time permitting, in all of the ongoing and upcoming programs, projects and events at Custer.

It's been an honor to have served as the sole editor and producer of the organization's flagship publication and I look forward to continued service alongside my esteemed colleagues.

Cheers,

Tom

*Tom Madigan, Editor and Producer*

*Fellow, RAS*

*Associate Member, AAS*

*“If the Stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile”*

*~Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## ***Custer Institute Recognizes Denis Svechkarev, President of the Ukrainian Astronomy Foundation (UAF) and The Kharkov Amateur Astronomers Society, Ukraine***

**By Tom Madigan**

Preceding his lecture on *Astronomy in the Ukraine* and an informal reception and dinner in his honor, Denis Svechkarev, doctoral candidate in Chemistry and instructor at the state university, was presented with the prestigious “*Sharing the Sky Foundation*” Award by Custer President, Donna McCormick.

As part of his lecture, Denis awarded honorary memberships in the KAAS to Donna McCormick and to Custer’s Treasurer, Barbara Lebkuecher.

Thanks to George Lomaga for facilitating Denis’s visit and for organizing the reception in his honor. As for myself, I would like to take this opportunity to extend a personal note of thanks to Denis for the honorary membership in the UAF and The Kharkov Amateur Astronomers Society that was presented to me by Denis on the occasion of his last visit.



Image credit, Thomas Madigan  
Custer’s President, Donna McCormick, presents Denis Svechkarev with the prestigious Sharing the Sky Foundation Award.



Image credit, Thomas Madigan  
With Custer member Sven Steen looking on, Denis presents Custer’s President, Donna McCormick, with a certificate of Honorary Membership in the Kharkov Amateur Astronomers Society.



Image credit, Thomas Madigan  
Denis presents Custer’s Treasurer, Barbara Lebkuecher, with a certificate of Honorary Membership in the Kharkov Amateur Astronomers Society.

The National Sharing The Sky Foundation (<http://www.sharingthesky.org>) is a not-for-profit corporation founded by David and Wendee Levy in 2006 and is headquartered in Vail, Arizona.

TJM

## Gift Corner & Classifieds

**We Have Meteorites!**

**Great sets mounted in beautiful display cases. Perfect for gifts.**

**Custer coffee mugs, only \$4.**  
Do you have yours yet?

**Custer Dome Assembly and Raising DVD \$10.00**

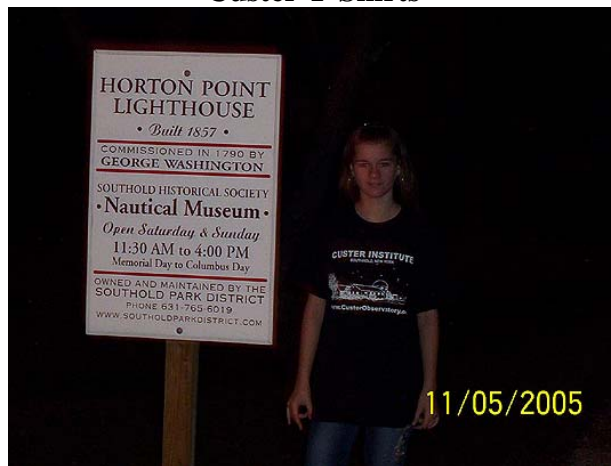
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1) Mail a check or money order, payable to Custer Institute, to this editor's address with a note indicating how many copies you would like; 2) Paypal to [CusterPaypal@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterPaypal@yahoo.com) followed by an email to this editor indicating the number of copies ordered and shipment instructions. Before shipment, I will confirm with Barbara that payment has been made. All my contact info is always published on page 3.

### An Evening With John Dobson

VHS or DVD format, \$10.00, \$3.75 S & H

On September 17, 2005, noted sidewalk astronomer and cosmologist, John Dobson, visited Custer. He presented his classic cosmic slide show, packed with information and delivered with inimitable wit; he shared stories about his life as a monk, secretly grinding mirrors, making telescopes and introducing the public to the wonders of the night sky. Board member, Rich Huber, filmed this memorable event and has made copies on VHS and DVD. Running time is approx. 90 minutes. The cost: \$10 with 25% of the proceeds going to John Dobson's San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers Association and a nominal \$3.75 for shipping and handling. You can pay for your tape using Paypal by sending \$13.75 to [CusterPaypal@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterPaypal@yahoo.com) or by sending a check or money order (made payable to *Custer Institute*) to: Dobson at Custer, P.O. Box 1204, Southold, New York 11971. Please specify whether you would like VHS or DVD. If you have any questions, please contact Donna McCormick at [mccormick@scientific-consultants.com](mailto:mccormick@scientific-consultants.com).

### Custer T-Shirts



Image, courtesy Tom Madigan

The editor's daughter, Kaitlin, sporting a Custer T-Shirt at Horton Point Lighthouse on Jamboree '05 night! The shirts are 100% heavy-weight cotton, machine-washable, and are available in adult sizes S-M-L-XL-XXL. The cost is \$12 plus \$3.75 S & H and the shirts are available only while supplies last. Custer would also like to *thank the East End Shirt Company* in Port Jefferson for their generosity and for having done an excellent job in producing such fine quality shirts on such short notice.

We have Susan Harder's patented & dark sky friendly **PARSHIELD®** Outdoor Floodlight Shields

for PAR 38 type bulbs. Controls glare, reduces light trespass & allows you to direct the light where you need it. Two shields per box in your choice of Off White or Bronze finish. \$20.00, tax incl.

### ASTRONOMY FOR ALL AGES

By  
Phil Harrington  
&  
Ed Pascuzzi

The Gift Shop still has a number of copies of this latest volume by Phil Harrington with co-author Ed Pascuzzi. Get your copy while supplies last. At just \$20, this is a real bargain! As an added bonus, copies are signed by Ed.

### PARALLAX

By  
Alan W. Hirshfeld

We also have a limited number of copies of this excellent volume by 2003-Jamboree guest speaker Alan Hirshfeld. Quantities are limited so hurry and add this well-written and informative volume to your collection while supplies last.

### Montauk Sunset Screensaver

PC compatible screensaver with musical accompaniment; please send a check in the amount of \$10, payable to Custer Institute, to this editors mailing address, published on the editor's page. Allow 7 - 10 days for your CD to arrive.

## Heavenly Events To Watch For July 2008

“ He got a good glass for six hundred dollars.  
His new job gave him leisure for stargazing.  
Often he bid me come and have a look  
Up the brass barrel, velvet black inside,  
At a star quaking in the other end.  
I recollect a night of broken clouds  
And underfoot snow melted down to ice,  
And melting further in the wind to mud.  
Bradford and I had out the telescope.  
We spread our two legs as we spread its three,  
Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it,  
And standing at our leisure till the day broke,  
Said some of the best things we ever said. “

- Robert Frost

The first two weeks of July allow a peek at MERCURY in brightening dawn skies low over the east-northeast horizon. Use binoculars to find it before 4:45 AM. VENUS is now in the evening sky, but sets too soon after sunset to be worth finding until late in the month; start looking ¼ hour after sunset along the west-northwest horizon. Still accelerating eastward along the starry ecliptic while slowly dropping in the terrestrial western sky, MARS flits past SATURN in the constellation of Leo, near the bright star Regulus. Don't miss seeing their gaudy impersonation of Orion's Belt on the 5<sup>th</sup>! Telescope users will notice that Saturn's rings are turning edgewise again. JUPITER, in bright Sagittarius, is at opposition on the 9<sup>th</sup> and is in the sky all night - albeit 22½° below the celestial equator.

- 1 Mercury is at greatest elongation west of the Sun today. An hour before sunrise, look for Mercury a few degrees below and to the right of the rising waning crescent Moon. And an hour after sunset, find Mars sitting on top of Regulus low in the west, with Saturn above and to the left of them both.
- 4 The Earth is at aphelion, farthest distance from the Sun, about 94.5 million miles.
- 5 Low in the west an hour after sunset is a splendid chain of worlds; Saturn (0.8 mag.), Mars (1.7 mag.), Regulus (1.4 mag.) And the thin waxing crescent Moon, all within a 15° stretch of sky!
- 9 Jupiter is at opposition this morning, about 390 million miles beyond Earth, as we pass between Jupiter and the Sun. At this closest approach its disk is 47 arcseconds across and it shines at -2.7 magnitude, more than 3 times as bright as the brightest nighttime star Sirius. (At no time this year is Jupiter in conjunction with the Sun.)
- 10 Mars and Saturn will be in conjunction tonight. They can be seen about an hour after sunset, about 0.7° apart, with Saturn above Mars. Compare the planets by telescope, using a wide-field eyepiece. A very close meeting of two bright planets. Saturn's rings are about 8° from edge-on.
- 16 The nearly-full Moon rises within the Milk Dipper of Sagittarius. Jupiter is not far to the left.
- 17 Full Buck Moon pursues Jupiter across the night sky tonight.
- 27 Observing conditions will be generally favorable moonwise for the peak of the Delta Aquarid meteor stream. The far-southern radiant of this display is between the Water Jar of Aquarius and the bright star Fomalhaut in Piscis Austrinus. The first meteors, if any, would appear after 11 PM and could continue past daybreak. These are generally faint, medium-speed meteors.
- 29 NASA is 50 years old. On July 29, 1958 the National Aeronautics and Space Act was signed into law.  
*Prepared by Robert Chapin*

**Editor:** You may wonder why I've included July's Heavenly Events in an August issue. There are several points of interest along with some valuable information included in Bob's write-up for July that don't expire simply because July '08 is now history. In particular, take note of Jupiter's opposition and the conjunction of Saturn and Mars. Both Jupiter and Saturn are relatively remote, so their placement in the sky wouldn't have changed significantly since the date indicated.

## Heavenly Events To Watch For August 2008

“ One star fell and another as we walked.  
Lifting his hand toward the west, he said –  
– How prodigal that sky is of its stars!  
They fall and fall, and still the sky is sky.  
Two more have gone, but heaven is heaven still. “

- Conrad Aiken

Were it not for the fact that MERCURY and VENUS are less than 5° apart from August 10 to mid-September, it wouldn't be worth looking for Mercury. Venus is bright enough to be found very low over the western horizon a half-hour after sunset; (binoculars are recommended and a clear view down to the horizon is necessary.) Mercury passes less than 1° beneath Venus on August 20. Scan below and to Venus' left for

Mercury before then, and below and to Venus' right after the 20<sup>th</sup>. MARS sets in evening twilight this month, above Venus and to her left. (The two will meet in fairly bright twilight in September.) SATURN sinks past Venus on the 13<sup>th</sup> and past Mercury two evenings later. Well away from this evening planetary scrum is JUPITER, due south in Sagittarius around 10:30 PM at midmonth and setting around 3 AM. Due to its deep-south location this year Jupiter seems to be in a hurry to set in the southwest. NEPTUNE reaches opposition in Capricornus on the 15<sup>th</sup>, leaving URANUS as the sole planetary resident of the morning sky in Aquarius.

- 1 New Moon this morning. Weather permitting, it brings the spectacle of a total solar eclipse across various arctic islands and straits in Nunavut, Canada, along the north coast of Greenland, southward across central Russia, and into China, ending near the city of Xian.
- 2 If you can find Venus, near the western horizon half an hour after sunset, try for the sliver crescent Moon to its left. Not easy. An easier crescent Moon will be well to the left of Saturn tomorrow evening; and on the 4<sup>th</sup> you can see it off to the left of Mars.
- 12 The early morning hours will bring the annual Perseid meteor display, always a treat on this particular bit of August as long as the Moon or clouds aren't aloft. This year the bright waxing gibbous Moon sets around 1:30 AM, leaving about 3 hours before daybreak for the Perseids.
- 13 This afternoon Venus and Saturn were only ¼° apart. After sunset you may see Saturn close to Venus. Use binoculars or telescope to enjoy this dynamic duo.
- 13 Tonight the Moon leads Jupiter across the southern sky. Tomorrow night Jupiter will take the lead.
- 15 Neptune is at opposition in the predawn hours. Right now it's about 12 arcminutes southwest of the 5<sup>th</sup> magnitude star 42 Capricorni. This 7.8 magnitude outermost planet is now 2.7 billion miles out beyond Earth. Its disk (tiny at that distance) measures only 2.3 arcseconds across, despite the fact that Neptune is 17 times as massive as the Earth.
- 15 Find Venus again over the western horizon soon after sunset. Just to the right of Venus, Mercury and Saturn are within 1° of each other. Mercury is the brighter of the pair.
- 16 Full Sturgeon Moon sets before sunrise, then rises near sunset.
- 20 After sunset find Mercury less than 1° directly beneath Venus. Saturn has dropped to obscurity beneath them, and Mercury itself will follow it next month.
- 30 The Old Moon of yesterday becomes the second New Moon of August. (No eclipse this time.)

*Prepared by Robert Chapin*

## Highlights for July-August 2008

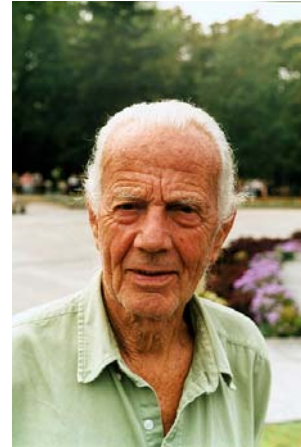
An Evening With The Legendary John Dobson

Saturday, August 30, 2008 at 8:00 P.M.

Suggested Donation: \$15. (\$8 Full-Time Students)

Reservations Strongly Suggested

Custer is honored to host this special evening with one of the most important contributors to astronomy in our time. John Dobson is a genuine living legend (<http://www.sidewalkastronomers.us/id31.html>). He revolutionized astronomy with his invention of the Dobsonian telescope mount and inspired countless individuals around the world to look up and appreciate the universe around them. He was born in China into a family of educators (his grandfather founded Peking University), obtained a degree in chemistry from University of California at Berkeley, and later became a Vedantic monk, attempting to reconcile science and religion. While at the monastery, he honed his skills as a telescope maker and launched the sidewalk astronomers movement. Many consider him to be the Father of Amateur Astronomy. He has authored several books (including *Beyond Space and Time*) and is the subject of the acclaimed film, "A Sidewalk Astronomer."



**John Dobson**

Please join us for this special evening when JD will read excerpts from his new book (which will be available for purchase), *The Moon is New*, and answer your questions about cosmology, his life, and his work with the clarity, wisdom and wit that have contributed to his reputation as a truly exceptional individual. Refreshments and observing (weather permitting) follow. Seating is limited so send in your registration or contact [CusterDonna@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterDonna@yahoo.com) today.

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PLEASE PRINT                      Send this form to the Custer Institute at the address above. Questions? Contact [CusterDonna@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterDonna@yahoo.com)

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Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 tickets, or \_\_\_\_\_ \$8 tickets for full-time students (enclose copy of ID). Confirmation only sent via email.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to join Custer as an \_\_\_ Individual (\$45), \_\_\_ Family (\$60), \_\_\_ Senior/Student (\$25), \_\_\_ Sponsor (\$100/yr)

\_\_\_\_\_ I am a Custer Member and would like to pay my dues in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to Custer Institute in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is my check or \_\_\_\_\_ I have made payment via [www.Paypal.com](http://www.Paypal.com) to the account of

**CusterPaypal@yahoo.com**

**TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_.** The Custer Institute is a 501(c)(3) NYS educational nonprofit reliant on public support.

## Welcome To Our New And Returning Members

A warm welcome is extended to Paul and Mirima Epstein, David Markel, Heather Cuzack, Judith Lockman, Tom Stock, Dominic Tringali, George Bissell, Louis Siracusano, Dianne and Brian Wamsley, Bruce Piasecki, Robert Anderson, Raj Swamy, Jeanne Lane, Karl Schmidt, Charles Scaringello, Mary and Tom Stenson, Theresa Ryther, Sam Notaro, Katherine Bedkowski, Pragma Kakani, Yvette Leung and to one and all!

## Perseid Meteor Shower

**Saturday, Aug. 9, 9:00 PM - Midnight (weather permitting)**

Although the peak of the shower is on August 12, a greater than usual frequency of meteors can be seen for a few days before and after most meteor showers as we pass through the trail of comet debris. So bring a blanket or a lawn chair and join us under the dark skies at Custer to watch the remnants from Comet Swift-Tuttle. This year, thanks to our new research equipment, we'll also be LISTENING to the meteors zoom by! Cost: FREE with General Admission (suggested donation of \$5 Adults, \$3 Children under 14, Free for Members).

Concert: Johnny Zarrow (<http://www.johnnyzarrow.com>) Band

**Saturday, Aug. 16, 8:00 - 9:30 PM**

A talented group of performers presenting a unique blend of rhythm & blues, funk, rock and even a little bit of country from Ray Charles to Cream to the Chambers Brothers, Rolling Stones and beyond. Join us for a funk-a-boogie spectacular! Suggested donation: \$13 Members, \$15 Non-Members.

## Field Trip To Brookhaven National Lab

**Sunday, Aug. 17, 2:30-5:00 PM**

We'll all meet at BNL to watch the "Wiz Bang Science Show" and tour the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider with BNL staff. Custer Members: email me your size and you'll receive a free BNL t-shirt when you're there. Check Custer's website closer to the date for details.

Directions: Take LIE to Exit 68 (William Floyd Parkway, CR 46), North; follow signs to BNL. If you're heading north, the entrance will be on your right. You'll have to stop at the guard station to get processed in and will be issued temporary visitor's tags

Mapquest link:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps?cat=brookhaven+national+laboratory#a/search/1:::US:::/m::10:40.869399:-72.8872:0:0:/so:Brookhaven+National+Laboratory:::r:25:::/e>

Concert: Jeanine Cullen (<http://www.jeaninecullen.com>)

**Saturday, Aug. 23, 8:00 PM**

Vocalist and songwriter from Long Island's North Fork who's jazz-infused voice and catchy grooves are equipped to carve out a unique, new facet in neo-soul/pop. A must-see event! Suggested donation: \$13 Members; \$15 Non-Members.

## Members' Night

**Friday, Aug. 29, 7:00 PM**

A Members-Only (and their guests) evening for mingling, enjoying the observatory and its resources, discussing Custer's present and planning its future together. Coordinator: David Van Popering. Admission: FREE.

## 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Astronomy Jamboree and Conference

**Friday & Saturday, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>**

Special guest speaker: Brother Guy Consolmagno, S.J., Ph.D, Associate Astronomer, Vatican Observatory and author of:

- Worlds Apart (with Martha W. Schaefer, Prentice Hall, 1993)
- Turn Left at Orion (with Dan M. Davis, Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- The Way to the Dwelling of Light (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998)
- Brother Astronomer, Adventures of a Vatican Scientist (McGraw Hill, 2000)
- Intelligent Life in the Universe? Catholic belief and the search for extraterrestrial intelligent life
- God's Mechanics: How Scientists and Engineers Make Sense of Religion (Jossey-Bass, 2007)

## Astronomy Science Fair for grades 8-12

**Saturday, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>**

Contact us for information about the fair and Custer's Education Through Research and internship program.

### On-Going

Every Sat. evening, from dusk until midnight, Custer Institute is open to the general public. Staff is on hand to provide guided tours of the sky (weather permitting) using laser pointers and powerful telescopes and are more than happy to answer any questions. Group visits by classes, scouts, and others are welcome (contact [CusterDonna@yahoo.com](mailto:CusterDonna@yahoo.com) to arrange). The facilities are also available for private functions.

### Custer Member Sam Storch on MSNBC.Com

Within the context of Friday's Total Solar Eclipse, Sam discusses Solar Eclipses on MSNBC.Com:  
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032619/vp/25973162#25973162>

Please note this link expires in ten days.

## ***Montauk Observatory Events***

### Perseid Meteor Shower

Date: Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Time: 8:30 PM

Place: Theodore Roosevelt County Park, Third House, Montauk

### General Meeting

Date: Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Time: 8:00 PM

Place: Theodore Roosevelt County Park, Third House, Montauk

## ***A Eulogy for George Vrattos***

As promised in the last issue of the Custer Comment, additional details will be published concerning the passing of life-time amateur astronomer, Custer Member and friend, George Vrattos. Through the efforts of Sam Storch, Custer member, professor, life-long friend and astronomer, George is immortalized in the mementos of others.

About George Vrattos, some thoughts collected by Sam Storch:

In a message dated 6/1/2008 11:03:33 PM Eastern Daylight Time, Sam Storch writes:

Tonight, I read in the latest issue of Custer Comment the announcement that George Vrattos had passed away. I am greatly saddened by this.

From Joe Rao

Sam —

I'm sorry to hear this news as well. It's just another very nice guy that crossed our respective paths, that has now passed into the great beyond. Last time I saw George it was at NEAF on a Sunday about three or four years ago. He wasn't really in the best of health, but he still managed to retain his dignity; we spoke freely about old times and then we parted company. I'll certainly remember him with fondness.

— Joe

From James Levy

Dear Sam,

Just got to read your sad message of yesterday. Here was a man who had a lot to say and too few people listened. George was kind and supportive when I joined ASLI, even pushing me to run for the Board, and was also a presence out at Custer and, I discovered only later, in Mensa, too. It was so strange to go to a Mensa pot luck one afternoon with my wife and see old George there firing away. Would that the stroke had not taken so much away from him. He didn't get the full use of his years, and that is worse than a shame.

Clear skies,  
James

From Joseph Storch

Dad,

I'm so sorry to read this news. George was a wonderful friend and a kind soul to Jeffrey and me. He was the perfect curmudgeon in the way that it should be. Tart, but not bitter. I am glad you got to spend that last dinner with him. A true loss.

Love,  
Joe

From Jo-Ann Tompkins

Dearest Sam,

I too am so very sorry to hear of the passing of George. With all my heart, I sincerely thank you for informing me. He will be remembered in my prayers! One day, I pray we will all again be together in that wonderful observatory in the sky. I have, and still do, miss Stan Page and George Lovi plus others we have lost in ASLI.

Your written tribute to him was one of the most beautiful I have ever read. God Bless Your Talent for writing!!

Luv, Jo-Ann

From Ron Rizzi

So sorry to hear about George Vrattos. I, too, have an indelible memory of George. He will surely be missed. Now he can view the cosmos from heaven. It would be appropriate to write some sort of eulogy in the next newsletter. At one time, he was an icon among us.

Ron

By Sam, himself

Dear Tom,

Tonight, I read in the Custer Comment that George Vrattos had passed away. I am greatly saddened by this.

Some few months ago, Rosanne and I took George out to a Sunday dinner; he had told me that he was being moved in just a few days to his son's house somewhere down south- I forget where, exactly.

We took him to a favorite Greek restaurant in Sayville, where we arranged for him to order his big lamb dinner entirely speaking in Greek. Both he and the restaurant's owner had a great time conversing. We spent a couple of hours all together that afternoon, and when I brought him back to his house we said good-bye to each other with the bond of the firmest handshake as George was known for.

He was a steadfast soul, one who stood by me and confided in me as I did in him for many years and through many vicissitudes of our lives. We often joked about the religious calendars, and he and I called each other for me to announce the dates of Greek Orthodox holidays and George to announce the Jewish Orthodox ones- we had a lot of fun with the calendars and their amusing complexities.

We shared a LOT of laughs as well as moments of introspection, and many good nights at the telescope, too. George and I got 109 out of 110 Messier objects at the Custer Messier Marathon of 1984. I still have somewhere the "log" from that famous all-nighter.

I will miss George very much. His simulated crusty demeanor easily revealed a man with a heart as big and affable as his smile. He was a fearless yet realistic fellow who was at home with microwave electronics and engineering, sound recording, and speaking a seemingly limitless number of foreign languages.

Thank you.

Sam Storch



ROBERT A. VANSON

**VANSON FINANCIAL**

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37 Valley Forge Dr., Bohemia, NY 11716 631-218-2350

Homepage <http://www.vansonfinancial.com>

E-mail [bvanson@aol.com](mailto:bvanson@aol.com)

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Jeffrey M. Lichtman

Phone: 954 554-3739

Skype: Jeffrey M. Lichtman or jeff\_c130h

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