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Winnicentrics

The Journal of the Winnipeg Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

Harry Potter In The Park

by Jim McLeod

Being new to astronomy, I found participating in a Public Observing Event hosted by the RASC to be both somewhat intimidating and great fun to be a part of. An answer from me to a question from the public would likely disappoint that curious member of the public, given my lack of knowledge of astronomy. Fortunately, the public at large knows even less than I do about astronomy and I am usually able to wriggle out of any awkward situations created by questions from those who expect me to know something, or for that matter anything, about the subject. That ability to wriggle was put to the test on 20 July at Assiniboine Park where, in conjunction with the celebration surrounding the release of the latest "Harry Potter" book, the RASC played host to a Public Observing Event.

It all started innocently enough. Earlier that evening I had taken possession of a new bow. Following that my two oldest kids, my Mum and I would check out the book release at the Park. Both of my children are huge Harry Potter fans and were looking forward to the fun. Apparently so were ten thousand plus other Harry Potter fans.

One saw the lineup long before one could see where it led. Our small group walked past the Pavilion and then moved on to the sporting ground area where I knew the RASC group had the telescopes set up. A huge line snaked its way across the field and I feared that this was the scope line. It wasn't. However, there appeared to be a crowd milling about up ahead separate from the long line of people. As I got closer I could see telescopes and near one of the scopes I saw the familiar figure of Gerry Smerchanski who was surrounded by members of the public wanting to look through his scope.

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MEETINGS

Room 118, St. John's College, University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus

Friday September 14

7:00-7:30 Beginner's session: Peter Toth: Telescope Basics
7:30-7:40 Welcome and announcements: Ron
7:40 to 7:50 News
7:50 to 8:00 Constellation of the Month: Aquila the Eagle: Gail Wise
8:00-8:10 What's up: Jay Anderson
8:10-8:30 What's New: Jennifer West
8:30-8:50 Break
8:50-9:00 Picture of the Month: Johnathon McLeod

9:00-9:50 Guest Speaker: Kevin Black: Astronomy Software 101: Kevin Black will review a number of popular and lesser known astronomy software programs ranging from free ware to more specialized applications for serious observers and astrophotographers.

9:50-10:00 Adjourn and head out for Pizza.

Friday October 12

7:00-7:30 Beginner's session: Gerry Smerchanski
7:30-7:45 Welcome, announcements and News: Ron Berard
7:45-8:15 Winnipeg Centre Elections: Lindsay Price
8:15-8:30 Special Presentation: Larry Desrochers: Manitoba Opera's 35th Anniversary Performance--The Transit of Venus World Premier!
8:30-8:50 Break
8:50-9:10 Awards Presentations
9:10-10:00 Guest Speaker: Scott Young: Sketching Astronomical Objects---Scott will discuss the fine art of making sketches of your observations. A number of techniques will be discussed and demonstrated.

10:00 Adjourn and go for Pizza at Boston Pizza

The Members Observing Nights are back!
It's getting dark earlier, so it's time to resume our monthly Members Observing Nights on the Saturday after the monthly meeting.

Saturday September 15

8 p.m. till whenever

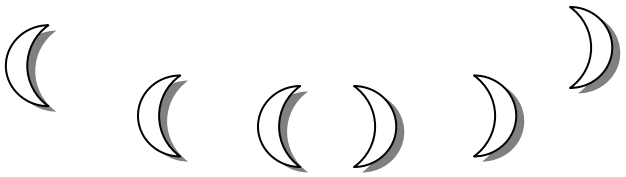
Saturday October 13

8 p.m. till whenever

These evenings are a great opportunity to learn from some of our more "seasoned" members, or to work on your observing certificates. And when it gets too cold to stay outside, we have coffee, tea, hot chocolate and cookies in the warm room. Not to mention the sparkling conversation.

News in a minute . . .

Guy Westcott is running an Astronomy program for the north-end youth. If any members want to come and help with observing or give a topic lecture it would be welcomed. Please contact Guy at blkhole@shaw.ca to arrange details. Observing will be in Sept/Oct time just one or two evenings, and will probably only be the moon and any planets that are available.



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Centre, and any opinions expressed are those of the author. If you have comments, questions or concerns about *Winnicentrics*, you can contact any of the councilors or write to RASC, Winnipeg Centre, Box 2694 Winnipeg MB R3C 4B3

Members' Observing Counts

The following members are working towards their:

Messier Certificates:

Eugene d'Auteuil	41
Murray Rennie	26
Lindsay Price	47
Kris Keller	109 (almost there!)

Finest NGC's:

Sean Ceaser	81
Ray Andrejowich	110
Berni Plett	45

Herschel 400's:

Stan Runge	188
Sean Ceaser	141
Mike Stephens	173

Explore the Universe:

Peter Toth	57
Stan Runge	13
Tim Kennedy	58
Judy Starr	22
Ray Starr	21
Eugene d'Auteuil	12
Murray Rennie	6
Sandy Shewchuk	47

Isabel Williamson Lunar

Mike Stephens	149

If you are interested in using the Warm Room please contact Lindsay Price for a key ($10.00 deposit required). If you would like training on the LX200 Lindsay will be running training sessions, but not on Members Observing Nights. You can contact him at 227-4684 or flprice@mts.net or talk to Lindsay at a meeting.

Welcome to our newest members!

Vanessa McKay, Winnipeg

Marc Mariage, Winnipeg

Wayne Barkhouse, Grand Forks, ND

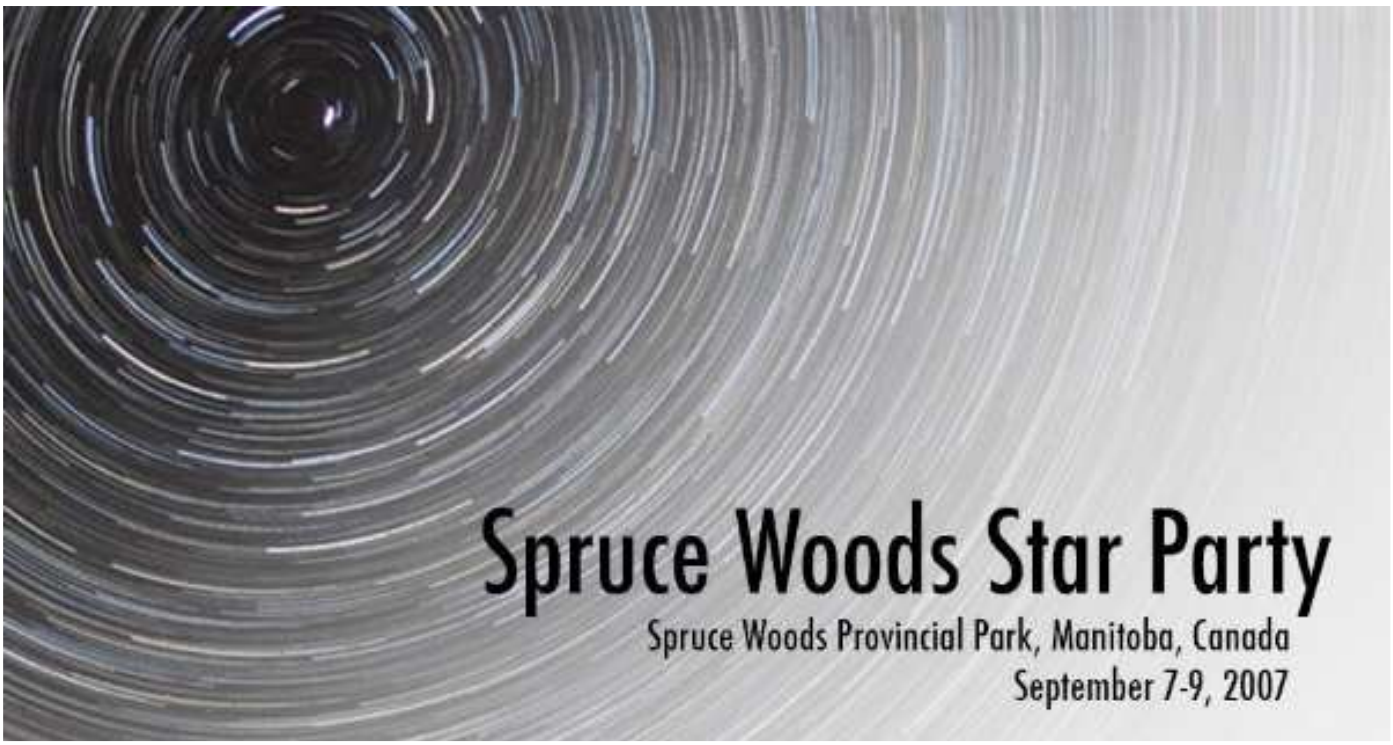
Patrick Chevallard, Winnipeg

(New Members list continued)

Lisa Johnston, Winnipeg

Erin Johnston, Winnipeg

Brian Theriault, Winnipeg

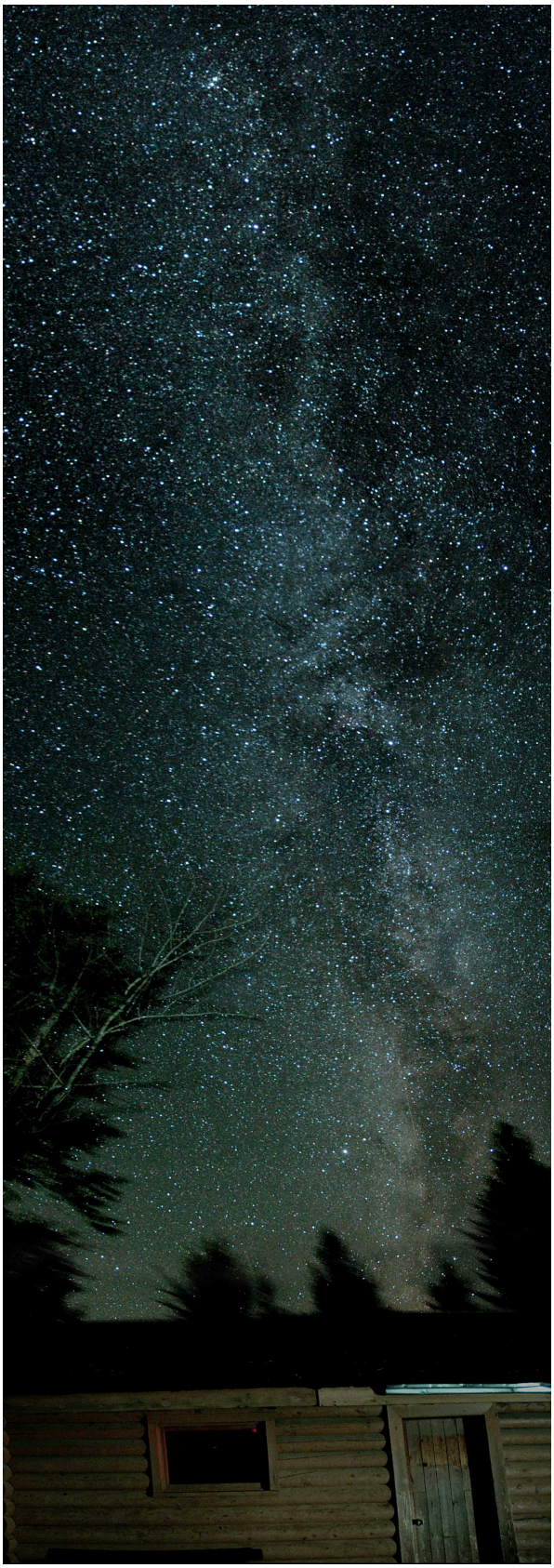


Don't miss the event of the year. Rain or shine, this year's star party has lots of fun events to offer, and shelter to help us stay dry doing them. Be there or spend the next year wishing you had!

President's Corner

Under Manitoba's Summer Skies

Ron Berard, President,
RASC Winnipeg Centre



It's perhaps come a little early---that time of year where the air is getting a bit of an edge to it in the mornings, and the sun is casting longer shadows as I drive to work. I can also see these shadows reaching out to touch and dull the summer buzz my children have been flying high on since June. Yes, back to school time. But for me, we're just approaching the zenith of my favourite time of year. (A Staples commercial comes to mind! ;)

But the summer's not quite over yet. For me, the summer went as well as I could have expected. It offered tolerable temperatures for both my vacation stints, split between mid July and early August. Both months offered some club related challenges, for me and numerous other members. There were meetings to prepare for of course, but there were also pleasant surprises. Generous donations from members have kicked off our first raffle in 10 years, creating a few logistical challenges and quick decisions, but the executive and council rose to the occasion. And other members were active with club events as well.

This summer probably saw a record number of public observing events held by or involving the help of RASC members in locations throughout Manitoba. These ventures were held in venues ranging from Oak Hammock Marsh, to a canoe-in cabin on the other side of a choppy Big Whiteshell lake. And the Manitoba skies did not disappoint; well, at least not on the most important occasions.

A shuttle chasing the ISS, the Perseid's and a few other showers kept the skies active during a good part of July and most of August as well. August's Members' Observing Session offered some of the best skies seen over Glenlea in quite a few years, making for a dark background to a sprawling milky way. A perfect backdrop for a good number of bright Perseids! And there were quite a few members out all night taking them in.

But it's the inky dark skies of Spruce Woods that makes this time of year ultra-special for me. And though SWSP is yet two weeks away as I write this article, a three night camping holiday with my family gave me two dark nights in Spruce Woods. This kept me combing the sky with my green laser pointer, my 15 X 70 binoculars, my 8" Dob, my D70, my naked eyes, and best of all, my friends and family. The highlight for me was lying on the beach beside my son and showing him constellations, counting burners, and recounting as much Lore I could recall (thanks Gail). Despite being at the heart of the Kiche Manitou Campground, even the beach is devoid of sodium vapor lighting, making the stars and my laser pointer conspicuous.

Considering how stressful life can get, (and we all know it can) I feel blessed for the beauty, peace, solitude, and sometimes even the community that the Manitoba skies have offered me this summer, and many before this one. And the fall offers even more hours of dark skies per day! Can it get any better? As I look forward to SWSP, I realize how lucky we are in Manitoba to have such dark skies within a few hours' drive from the heart of our modest metropolis. Let's hope our club's activities continue to share this gift with as many people as possible. And let's hope those efforts help keep the skies as they are or better for years to come.

Harry Potter In The Park *continued from page 1*

Scattered about the area were other telescopes each with its own group of people about it, all waiting their turn to look through the scope. Scott Young, in full wizard regalia, and a number of other RASC members in similar attire were at an information table fielding queries from the curious public. Throughout the area of the event, groups of people were dressed in the manner of characters in the Harry Potter book series. Hagrids, Dumbledore's and all manner of wizards and Quidditch players roamed about in the night. It was all pretty cool.

My plan for the evening at this time was to say hello to the RASC folks, look through a few scopes, check out the Harry Potter stuff with the kids and then head on home to admire the new bow. As they say in the military, "no plan survives first contact with the enemy." Even though we were dealing with the "public" in this case and not the "enemy", my plan for the night did not survive first contact with the public.

Not far from where Gerry was set up a telescope sat unmanned and was pointed nowhere in particular. Like a grizzled sergeant in battle, Gerry called out, "McLeod, go man that scope!" I went to my post and noticed the scope lacked an eyepiece. Gerry soon supplied one, a 18mm wide field, and I was in business. However, this scope had a few problems of its own, one being its ability to not stay on target. Once set, the altitude of the OTA would slowly move away from where it should be. This made staying on target somewhat difficult. The solution involved a little "MacGiver-ing of the altitude bearings. Some pieces of plastic from a bag on the altitude bearings and my daughter's sweater as a counterweight somewhat solved the problem. A paperclip would have made everything right but no paperclip was to be found.

Now, what to set the scope on? The two popular targets that night were the Moon and Jupiter. Being a believer in the concept of, "keep it simple" I chose Jupiter as my target. Before I had even zeroed in on the ol' gas giant, a line had formed beside the scope. As the public took their turns looking through the scope, I fielded the basic questions they gave me and I may have even answered them correctly. Occasionally the line would get too close to the scope and I would gently remind them to stay away from the instrument lest they knock it off target.

All was fine …for while. As the hour of the release of the new Harry Potter book drew near, the crowd became more excited. It was not so much that the public was being overly aggressive but the crowd was becoming more restless. As an example, clusters of people standing in line were now constantly drifting into the OTA knocking it off target and I would have to re-sight the scope. By the way, did I mention that my scope had no Finder Scope or Telrad, or anything of the like for that matter, to assist me in putting the scope on a target? This fact made finding objects, how shall I say, interesting. What is more, some people had a tendency to grab the scope when viewing through it and some children had to be torn away from the scope by their parents in order to let another person have a turn. Some people thought taking photos of them and their friends near the scope was a good idea. A camera flash does wonders for one's night vision and one poor guy had his eye in the eye piece when someone directly in front of the

scope took a photo in his direction with much of the flash entering the OTA. I last saw him being led away by his girlfriend with the fellow holding his hand over his eye. That was it. Time to restore order.

I asked those with cameras to kindly refrain from taking pictures near the scope, as the flash would ruin our night vision. Some park security staff on an ATV parked about twenty feet from my position with their headlight directly on our group and the telescope. I asked them if they would mind going elsewhere as their headlight made it difficult for us to see through the scope. The park staff promptly left the immediate area. People were asked to line up away from the scope and were reminded to back up as they inevitably drifted closer to the scope time and again. All were told not to touch the scope as they viewed through it as the slightest knock and or touch always sent the scope off target, which would necessitate me having to again re-sight the scope using my "cannon sighting" technique. These measures somewhat restored order to the crowd at my scope and all enjoyed some pretty good views of the object we were observing.

After about an hour and a half on Jupiter I felt it was time to find something else to look at. The light pollution in the park was terrible. As a result, the choice of targets was quite limited. I was able to put the scope on Albireo and a few other targets that are easy finds for me. I had hoped to be able to put a nice globular cluster in the eyepiece but the sky was simply too bright to provided a decent view.

At this time a young lady walked up to my scope and asked if she could look at a galaxy. She apparently knew quite a bit about galaxies but had never seen one in telescope. Uh-oh … this request was going to be a toughie. Earlier in the evening I had found M51 but it was very, very dim and was a definitely a most unimpressive faint fuzzy. Not wanting to disappoint the young lady, I resolved to find Andromeda, which was in a particularly light polluted area of the sky. As she waited for me to find the target I feared that I would disappoint her. The pressure was definitely on. However, this is where all the practice pays off. I could see Mirach and after a little pan and scan, M31 hove into the field of view of the eyepiece! The young lady was able to see her galaxy and we 'high fived' after finding it. I announced to the crowd that I had the Great Andromeda Galaxy in this scope. That news attracted quite a few people which was good in that this target is indeed something cool to look at but bad in that the problem of people knocking the scope off target had returned in force. Fortunately I was able to find M31 after these incidents and I was able to bring the target back into view.

And then, midnight.

A cry rose from the crowd as the latest HP book was officially released. The atmosphere at the event could fairly be described as being 'electric'. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves a great deal. My mum and the kids were somewhere in the throng. I was able to keep track of them via cell phone. Finally, the crowd, now sated for their hunger of things Harry Potter, began to noticeably disperse. There were still quite a few people looking through scopes but these people were much easier to manage compared to the mob scene earlier in the evening. As

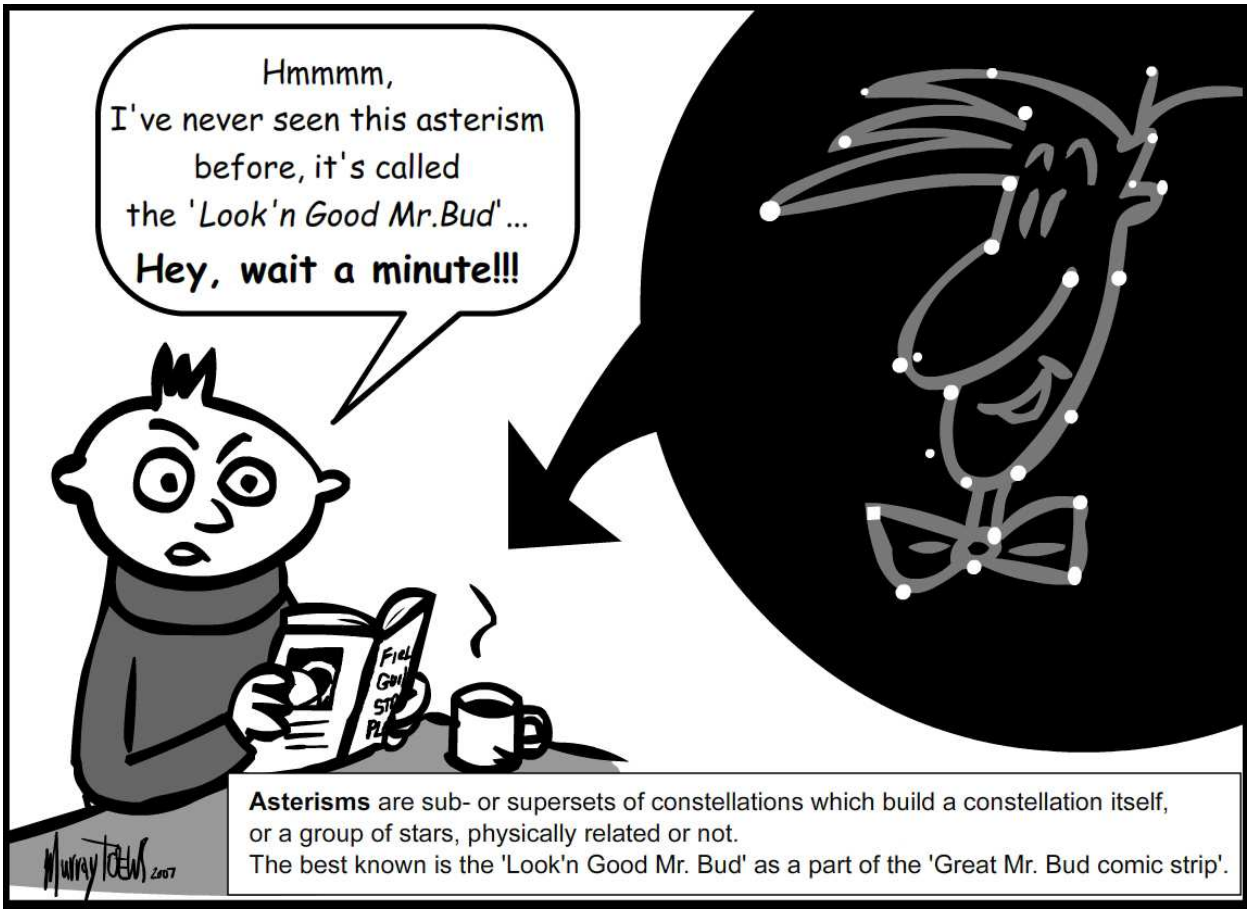
the public's numbers dwindled ever more, our head 'wizard' Scott Young called time on the event. Whew! We survived the magical night of Harry Potter in the Park.

My evening at this event turned out to be other than what I had planned on but that did not matter. Helping out the RASC group is fun and an event such as the Harry Potter book release made that fun even greater. I am not sure if we will ever again have a crowd on the scale of this event but if we do, I will most definitely be bringing my own scope with it's working altitude control and Telrad.

Well done, Winnipeg Centre of the RASC.

Mr. Bud . . . Does astronomy

by Murray Toews



ELECTIONS 2007

It's that time of year again!

At the October meeting we will elect three new Councilors. Any Centre member in good standing can nominate another Centre member using the form on the next page.

The position of Councilor is a great way to join the RASC Council. It involves attending the council meeting (4 to 8 a year) at which we help make the decisions about what we do for the year. Councilors assist the Executive in running Centre meetings and events. Councilors also assist in public observing and other public relations activities, such as Astronomy Day. There is also an expectation that each member of Council will host one members' observing event per year at the Observatory, and offer at least one presentation at a Centre meeting or write at least one article for the newsletter per year. In addition, Councilors will assist in Centre projects such as public observing sessions, Astronomy Day programs, observatory maintenance or other tasks as their skills and interest allow. This is a 3-year term.

Terms expiring are Ralph Croning, Marlene Wallace and Stephen Smyth. Each has served one term and is therefore eligible to allow their name to stand for a second.

Nominees for Councilor must have been members of the Winnipeg Centre in good standing for one (1) year prior to nomination. To nominate a current member for a position, nomination forms may be mailed to:

Nomination Committee
c/o Lindsay Price
37 Amundsen Bay
Winnipeg MB R3K 0V1

or brought to a meeting.

Nominations for Council will also be taken from the floor at the October meeting.

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA WINNIPEG CENTRE NOMINATION FORM

I, _____

being a member in good standing of the Winnipeg Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, do hereby nominate

_____
(name of nominee)

for the position of _____

for the 2007/2008 membership year.

I, _____

being a member in good standing of the Winnipeg Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, accept the nomination and will allow my name to stand for election at the Annual Meeting of the Winnipeg Centre. I certify that I meet the membership qualifications of the position I am nominated for and understand the duties and responsibilities of the position.

In witness hereof:

_____ _____
Signature of Nominator Date

_____ _____
Signature of Nominee Date

Variety Club Connections

Ron Berard

Last edition of the Winni included an article by Marni Dangerfield about an observing event and presentation we were invited to provide at the Variety Club's Brereton Kid's Camp. The following article was written by Lucy Felbel, a very energetic volunteer that organizes special events and who's been a part of the Variety Club Family:

> "We had an absolutely FANTASTIC TIME AT CAMP THIS YEAR...THANKS in LARGE PART TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE: **Ron Berard** and his beautiful children, **Danielle** and **Aidan**; **Kris Keller** and his gorgeous girls, wife **Alicia** and daughters **Michelle** and **Natalie**; and **Marni Dangerfield.** Ron, Kris and Marni are part of the RASC (Royal Astronomical Society of Canada), and so Ron and Kris brought their rather large telescopes, (with Marni to help), and we were absolutely amazed and awed because we got to see **SATURN WITH ITS RINGS, VENUS IN ITS HALF MOON PHASE, JUPITER WITH SOME OF ITS MANY MOONS, AND THE CHEESIEST MOON EVER!!** (You have no idea how many people said that they want to invest in a telescope NOW!!!) Miss Marni came along, not only to help the gentlemen with the superb night sky demonstrations, but she also lent a hand with kitchen duty all weekend. On Saturday night, whilst it was still "light" outside, Ron gathered all the children and their parents in the Dining Lodge, where he initiated an interactive program to demonstrate how far the planets were from each other as well as from the sun. Everyone enjoyed this immeasurably; in fact, some children continued to go to Ron and ask him questions for the entire rest of the weekend, because they had been so impressed and enthralled with the demonstration! All of the camp attendees came to me to tell me how extremely impressed they were with the viewing of the planets, and everyone also said how extremely impressed they were with the "new families" !! We had the BEST TIME EVER...THANKS TO RON, KRIS AND MARNI (and their respective families) because of their exceedingly helpful ways! THANKS AGAIN TO THESE WONDERFUL PEOPLE!!!"

This Labour Day Long Weekend, I was invited back to participate in an Annual Turkey Dinner event, held yearly to raise funds and build relationships in the communities surrounding Brereton Lake. They let me set up a display for selling RASC Raffle tickets during the dinner and we sold 24 tickets. Also, Charlotte Kaisaris, Variety Club's business manager, offered to sell tickets to their rather extensive list of volunteers and contacts. They are hoping that should one of their families or contacts win the telescope,

they may consider donating it to the club. They have plans to set up a telescope shelter out on a rocky point that offers a relatively unobstructed view of sky. They are looking to us for guidance and anything we could offer to help them realize their dream to have a good quality, easy to use telescope as the focal point of an astronomy program for the kids and their families. And how better to help them connect to the sky?

"Charlotte's Point": Proposed site for the Variety Camp Observing area.

Steph and Lorren observe through 15X70 Binoculars

For further information or links to more photos from the Variety Kid's Camp or Labour Day Dinner event, contact me at rcberard@gmail.com