



# Winnicentrics

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

## The “Galileo Moment”: Showing People Their First View Through the Telescope

by *Scott Young*

**F**or the International Year of Astronomy, Canada has set a goal of creating one million “Galileo Moments” in 2009. A Galileo Moment is that moment of personal discovery, the realization that the universe is bigger and grander than one had ever imagined. Probably the most effective and certainly the most authentic way to give someone a “Galileo moment” is to show them their first view through a telescope – that’s how Galileo did it, and that’s something that RASC members across the country have been doing for decades.

There are a few ways to improve the “Galileo Moment”, and there are also ways to kill it. Here are a few “do’s” and “don’t’s” for public telescope sessions:

**DO** have your telescope in good working order, with a sturdy mount and decent eyepiece that the viewer can reach.

This means having a solid mounting, a step stool for kids, and a couple of eyepieces so you can have one in your pocket de-fogging after someone breathes on it in the cold. It also means that you should leave small or wobbly telescopes at home. Much as I rave about what a well-trained observer can do with the infamous 60mm Tasco, most first-timers will see only a small image which lacks detail. If you only have access to a small telescope, either borrow one of the Centre’s loaner scopes for the night, or pair up with someone else who has a large telescope and help manage the crowds.

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# MEETINGS

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

## Friday January 9

7:00-7:30 Beginner's session:

7:30-7:40 Welcome and Announcements: Peter Toth

7:40-7:50 News: Peter Toth

7:50-8:00 Constellation of the Month – Taurus the Bull: Gail Wise

8:00-8:10 What's up: Jay Anderson

8:10-8:30 What's New: Jennifer West

8:30-9:00 Break

9:00-9:50 **Guest speaker: to be announced**

Plans are still being made for a guest speaker for January, but you can be sure that the program will be superior as always. Watch the webpage for updates.

## Friday February 13

7:00-7:30 Beginner's session:

7:30-7:40 Welcome and Announcements: Peter Toth

7:40-7:50 News: Peter Toth

7:50-8:00 Constellation of the Month – Cancer the Crab: Gail Wise

8:00-8:10 What's up: Jay Anderson

8:10-8:30 What's New: Jennifer West

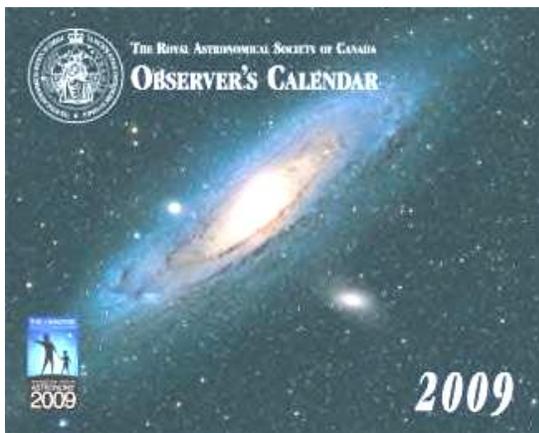
8:30-9:00 Break

9:00-9:50 **Guest speaker: to be announced**

Plans are still being made for a guest speaker for February, but you can be sure that the program will be superior as always. Watch the webpage for updates.

## News in a minute . . .

THE RASC 2009 CALENDARS ARE HERE!  
Get your copy now! These calendars have wonderful images of our universe taken by RASC members across the country. You will want to keep this as a souvenir copy of IYA2009. The price is \$16.00 and you can get one (or more) at a meeting from Mike Stephens or Gail Wise



January 10<sup>th</sup> – IYA Kick-off at The Forks Market, 5PM to 10PM. Join us for the kick-off to the International Year of Astronomy! We'll be showing people the full moon and doing constellation tours, and handing out star maps and IYA calendars. Volunteers should contact Scott Young at [sdy@mts.net](mailto:sdy@mts.net) or 791-9169.

January 15<sup>th</sup> – Star Party at Oak Hammock Marsh, 7PM. The first IYA party at the Marsh – volunteers get in free, but regular Oak Hammock Marsh admission applies to guests and the public. More details will follow about this.

### The Winnipeg Centre Executive Council

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*Winnicentrics* is published six times each year by the Winnipeg Centre, RASC. *Winnicentrics* is produced by and for the members of the Winnipeg 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	110

## Finest NGC's:

Sean Ceaser	110
Ray Andrejowich	110
Berni Plett	45

## Herschel 400's:

Stan Runge	200
Sean Ceaser	173
Mike Stephens	318
Gil Raineault	200

## 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
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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.

The Winnipeg Centre has several loaner telescopes that can be used by members for a month at a time. If you would like to use one, talk to anyone on Council.

## We have the following new members

Michael Ducharme, Winnipeg

Kian Tan, Winnipeg

Ronald Eros, Winnipeg

Silvia Graca, Winnipeg

Gerry Burgess, Winnipeg

Welcome to our Club!

## The “Galileo Moment” *continued from page 1*

**DON’T** freak out when (not if!) kids push on the scope or pull the eyepiece towards them or fog the eyepiece with their breath or some other faux pas.

It’s going to happen, so plan for it and don’t use your \$600 eyepiece for a public event. Use decent eyepieces with a decent field of view and medium magnification, to make the image as large as possible. If you want to come out and do CCD photography or your own stuff, either set up away from the public scopes, or better yet, go to another site. The public only knows that we’re there to show them the Moon, so they’ll be constantly coming up and asking to have a look through your telescope. If you’re going to say “no” to them, you probably shouldn’t be there in the first place.

**DO** choose an object that your telescope will show well.

In almost all cases, this means the Moon, Jupiter, or Saturn. No other objects have the immediate impact in small or medium-sized telescopes that a newcomer expects. In 2009, the Moon will be the most reliable target. Saturn will be next, in the spring and early summer, but you’ll need decent magnification to show the rings, which are nearly edge-on for most of 2009. Jupiter isn’t conveniently visible until the end of the year, and will be fairly low, and none of the other planets offer much of anything to a first-time viewer. First-time viewers have trouble spotting detail in a small image, so crank up the power. This also has the side-effect of highlighting the earth’s rotation in non-tracking mounts – which lets you explain the rotation of the earth AND have to get your own eyes in there to adjust the scope fairly often, allowing you to observe as well.

**DON’T** show the public Venus, Mars, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune, the dwarf planets, or any deep-sky objects!

While this rule has exceptions, there aren’t many (see below). No deep-sky objects are bright enough from an urban setting to guarantee a great view for all first-time viewers, and the planets named above all appear featureless and boring to most observers. Even Mars at its record approach in 2003 was pretty bland to most folks. Standing in line to get a first view like this will convince the budding observer that observing is lame and it’s better to sit inside and surf the web instead.

Exception to the rule: if you’re in a dark-sky site with a big scope, then go ahead and show someone the Hercules Cluster or Orion Nebula. Even then, not many other objects have the impact for newbies – remember they probably don’t know about “averted vision”, and won’t get the same view you will.

Another exception is at the end of the night, for those few folks who have stuck around and are ready to take the “next step”. These are the ones who start asking a lot of questions, and keep coming back for just one more look. Make sure you give them an RASC brochure, because this is the group of people where most of our members came from at some point – looking for the follow-on to the “Galileo Moment” they had at a public star night.

**DO** know what you’re talking about.

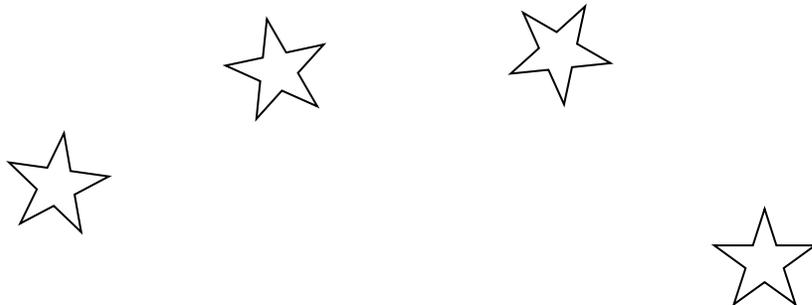
Since you’ll be focusing on one or two objects for most public observing, make sure you know a few things about them. Distance to the moon and Saturn, diameter of Saturn’s rings, the magnification you’re using, and a few other tidbits are always useful. Don’t bombard people with data, but be able to answer some basic questions. Have a handout available with some basic telescope information and suggested references, and have RASC brochures handy.

**DON’T** take the conversation over.

Remember, we’re in a public setting – save the high-tech astrophotography talks for Boston Pizza after the Centre meetings. I know we don’t get to see each other in a social setting very often, and it’s sometimes hard to remember that we’re there to talk to the new folks. But there is little that discourages a newbie more than having to break into a group of old friends chatting about something that’s way above the public knowledge level. There are lots of other ways to make a successful public event – if you have suggestions or comments, send them out to the Centre email address (which you can sign up for through the website, [www.winnipeg.rasc.ca](http://www.winnipeg.rasc.ca)). See you under the sky!



*Scott*



For everyone born under the sign of Astronomus, which extends from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, these predictions should help you navigate your way through the **International Year of Astronomy**

### January

Frostbitus, the Goddess of White Fingers, will visit you if you forget to wear that extra pair of mittens. Maybe Draco the Dragon could breathe some fire to warm us up as IYA kicks off on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

### February

This is the shortest month, and it's a good time to look for the constellation with the longest neck, Camelopardalis. You will want to be out as many nights as possible, but please stay home one night with your valentine or you may get a visit from ColdShoulderus, the Goddess of You-Don't-Wanna-Know

### March

Nebulous, the God of Clouds, makes his appearance as this month is traditionally lousy for observing. Add some Bailey's to your midnight coffee and you'll never notice.

### April

Felinus, the Goddess of Cat-Lovers, favours us this month with the return of Leo the Lion. The nights aren't quite as cold anymore, so prepare for a lot of indecision this month. What to wear? What to bring? The more you have with you, the more you will have to unpack when you get home . . .

### May

Overloadus makes his return and challenges us to pick out the Virgo galaxies we need for our certificates and ignore the rest. This is the best motto to help you, Yifs'l Sof Ifs'l J'Tju, although nobody knows what it means.

### June

The god Annoyus has turned the Big Dipper upside-down, proving that it is full of mosquitoes.

### July

EterniusLightus has decided to give us a few weeks where it doesn't matter if we drinkus too muchus.

### August

StarPartyus, the Goddess of NoSleepAtAll, is filling up the weekends again. Maybe you should take your summer holidays this month and try to get a *couple* of hours of sleep, even if it's during the day.

### September

Tedius, the God of Getting-Back-Into-Routines challenges you to find time for astronomy now that you're back to driving your kids everywhere.

### October

This month has the return of the watery constellations: Pisces, Aquarius, Cetus and Eridanus. Too bad it's cloudy for so much of October; this month really is all wet for astronomy.

### November

Aaaah, finally a month when it isn't too cold, and there are reasonable hours of darkness. One out of twelve isn't bad . . . is it?

### December

Too many Christmas parties will leave no time for astronomy. Now you know why Taurus the Bull has red eyes.