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Blog

2014 Michiana Star Party

Posted by admin on March 25, 2014



Leave the lights of the city behind--and your worries with them--and enjoy the [2014 Michiana Star Party](#) held at Dr. T.K. Lawless Park in Vandalia, MI. Observers will arrive with gear on Friday afternoon, May 30, and enjoy the company of the stars and each other through Sunday morning, June 1, 2014. Hosted by the [Michiana Astronomical Society Inc.](#) (MAS), the star party welcomes experienced astronomy enthusiasts and newcomers alike to a casual gathering of like-minded souls that revel in nature's beauty overhead.



Here's how a typical star party unfolds, adapted from [Michiana Star Party 5](#):

Friday Arrival

On Friday evening, the scope owners start to arrive at the park entrance, eager to stretch after driving in from Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan. They find a preferred camping spot where their telescope can be conveniently set up adjacent to their tent or camper or motor home. Out come scopes, chart tables, flashlights, and chairs. Some bring a high step ladder just to reach the elevated eyepiece of their bigger scopes when aimed skyward. For some, it's the first outing in springtime under dark skies, while other more intrepid observers have simply been doing it year-round.



The atmosphere is casual as star party participants wander the field meeting old acquaintances or making new ones. Okay, there is a slight geek factor as they compare new eyepieces they've acquired or scopes they've modified. Anticipation runs high, for a mostly clear night is a fine reward for someone who has been preparing a list of targets to view that first night.



Newbies are always eagerly welcomed into the fold. Register and pay the fee, and if you've got a telescope, set up alongside the big scopes. Ask for insight on how to get the most of your humble gear, and expect to spend hours drifting from scope to scope as you compare the starfields or learn new tips from each observer. Sure, that wobbly scope given to you by a well-intentioned family member may seem out of place among the more serious attendees. But don't let your first foray into real stargazing be overwhelmed by someone who's been doing it as a hobby for years. Learn from the veterans. Embrace the opportunity to get more discovery in your own ensuing outings. I might drive an old mini-van, but I still enjoy an occasional fine auto show.

If the weather is cloudy on Friday evening, May 30, visitors give informal talks under the shelter. A video projector is available if you want to bring materials or a prepared digital slide show that is astronomy related. Look for a sign-up sheet to get in the queue. You'll be surprised at how informed and passionate about astronomy some of the amateurs are. Afterward, a movie may be shown, too.



Scopes Up

Finally, night settles in. Telescope tubes of all sizes are aimed in different directions. Perhaps a cluster of people have gathered to socialize around one random scope. Other observers may be stationed at their own equipment, diligently hopping from target to target in an observer's marathon, but step right up and ask if you can take a peek. From my experience, anyone who's got significant aperture to gather the light of distant celestial highlights is always willing to share the goodness. We thank the corps of skilled amateurs who choose to attend the Michiana Star Party.



Whether you view the familiar rings of Saturn--stunning every time!--or some crazy hazy blob that is an uber-distant galaxy, you'll soon delight in the immensity and diversity of the universe. From the safe, quiet comfort of a dark field in Michiana, you are witnessing mega-worlds and tumultuous denizens of galactic proportions, separated by unfathomable distances. Yet it is all brought to light by an offshoot of astronomy's great tool, the telescope. All in one pair of nights, May 30-June 1.

After a long night of observing, most people sleep in. There are options. [Dr. T.K. Lawless Park](#) has much outdoor appeal, and it is connected to miles of trails for hiking, biking (helmets required), and running. Check out springtime flowers, or be the first to greet deer ambling in the woods. Or maybe just grab a cup of hot coffee from the shelter and recount with other morning stragglers what you saw the night before.

Saturday Features

Saturday brings its own rewards. Invited speakers will present their insight at 11:00, 2:00, and 3:00 p.m. Enjoy top notch speakers in a casual park setting. Among the 2014 talent is **David Fuller**, creator of [Eyes on the Sky](#), whose weekly video series guides amateur astronomers in finding the best current highlights in the sky.



At 11:00 a.m. **Dayle Brown**, will share some of the stories from her book series, *Skylore from Planet Earth: stories from around the world... ORION, ... PLEIADES, ...MILKY WAY, ...VENUS, ...Our MOON, and to be published soon, ...COMETS & METEORS.*

Stories from around the world from ages ago tell us about heroes, gods, and monsters. Mythologies and legends have been passed down from storytellers, who speak of the starry night with animated characters. Dayle writes and illustrates her own books and is a wonderful storyteller as well!

(Noon – 2 pm: Lunch break)

At 2:00 p.m. **Jim Hopkins** addresses Spring and Summer Constellations. Jim has taught physics and astronomy at both the high school and college level, while he has enjoyed 40 years of amateur astronomy with two refractors, two SCT's, and two Dobsonian reflectors. Having taught in a planetarium has helped Jim learn the night sky very well.

Jim will use PowerPoint and Starry Night Pro+ to teach you about constellations as seen from different latitudes on Earth. Learn the differences between asterisms and constellations, zodiacal constellations as well as targets within constellations, and more.

David Fuller has been interested in space and astronomy since he was 10 years old. Frustrated with light pollution, he created "Eyes on the Sky" in 2008 to raise awareness, adding YouTube videos in 2010. With 600,000+ total views and over 8,000 followers / subscribers on social media, Dave makes it easier to understand telescopes, stargazing, and finding objects in the night sky. He also enjoys building tripods and other astronomy equipment, and his "Super Simple Tripod 2x4" was featured in the February 2014 issue of *Sky and Telescope*.

Don't miss opportunities to view the sun safely through solar filtered telescopes on Saturday. The sun is in a period of high activity, so you've got a good chance of see sunspots and prominences, depending on the equipment used. Afterward, some of us will take a nap at dusk to reserve energy for the coming night's treats.

During the day, the [telescope gear](#) of recently-deceased colleague Mike Sprow will be displayed, priced, and available for purchase. All proceeds benefit his wife.

Saturday night brings a second opportunity to take in the splendors of a dark sky, so rest up. Sunset is at 9:11 p.m. EDT, with all eyes soon turning skyward to find the first telescopic targets. Nautical twilight is shortly after 10:27 p.m., and astronomical twilight is at 11:17 p.m.

Registration

Visit the MAS website at <http://www.michiana-astro.org> to register for the Michiana Star Party in advance and save money. Frankly, the savings are welcomed but not a lot of money because the entire cost of the star party is exceedingly low to begin with. Still, it's always nice to have a few more Abe Lincolns in your wallet or purse. And your pre-registration is very much appreciated by the organizers of the event. A portion of the fees go to Cass County Parks for their generous allowance for our overnight activity. You can always pay full rate at the gate on either Friday or Saturday evening.

As noted in the pre-registratiOn flyer ([PDE](#), [MSWord](#)), admission at gate for adults is \$30, under 18 is \$10, and camping fee is included. For guests with no intention of setting up equipment and who will be leaving by midnight, a small fee of \$5 per day is requested. That's a lot of heaven(s) for five bucks.



Door Prizes

Nick Schuck will be attending on behalf of [Optec Inc.](#), which makes all sorts of astronomy products mostly for automated observatories and/or imaging setups, for amateur level up to professional astronomy level equipment. Among the door prizes from Optec are a PBS DVD about the telescope, a couple Optec red flashlights, and an Optec 2" to 1.5" compression adapter (for centering eyepieces in a 2" focuser, makes switching eyepieces much easier).

[Orion Telescopes and Binoculars](#) has made a generous donation of astronomy items:

10008 1 Binocular Stargazing Kit
08447 1 10x25 E-Series Monocular
52175 1 StarShoot Solar System IV
05674 1 StarSeek Tel. Connection Cable
05825 1 6 Piece Optics Cleaning Kit
05942 1 AstroGoggles
04110 1 Orion Star Target Planisphere
05768 1 RedBeam Mini LED Flashlight
51919 2 MoonMap 260
21067 3 Solar Sys, Moon & Meteor Kit

Additional contributions to the star party:

Linda Marks and Steve Accuosti:

- Stash Cards for computer
- (2) USB Café Pad for warm coffee
- USB Cool IT chiller for cool beverages

Celestron:

- Cosmos First Scope

Bob's Knobs:

- gift certificate for a set of collimation thumbscrews

Michiana Astronomical Society:

- (2) 2013 MSP5 T-shirts
- David Chandler's Night Sky Planisphere (Large)
- Telrad Telescope Reflex Finder with Mounting Base # 1001
- GSO 1.25" Neutral Density Filter ND96-0.6 25% Transmission Moon Filter
- Celestron LensPen Optics Cleaning Tool # 93575

Jim Hopkins:

- John Dobson DVD

Acts of Kindness

If you're new to attending a star party, here are some guidelines. Basically, we ask that you not be offensive. For astronomers, that includes driving into or out of an observing area with your headlights on full beam. You want to avoid that gaffe.

- * Arrive after 3:00 p.m. Friday, set up before dusk
- * Star party ends at 11:00 a.m. Sunday
- * Parking in designated parking area
- * No car movement on the field after dark
- * Bring battery power for motorized mounts
- * Red flashlights only!
- * Minors must be accompanied by an adult
- * Dogs on leashes are allowed
- * Vendors and swap tables welcome!
- * Acoustical music instruments welcome!
- * Inappropriate behavior will result in eviction
- * Dress warmly
- * Smoking permitted beyond telescope areas, downwind
- * You are responsible for the security of your own belongings.

I hope to see you under the stars, whether you are spending the weekend with us or just a few hours. Hopefully you'll have that memorable dark-sky experience in the Midwest, if that's closer to your home. Bring a child or friend to share the splendor.

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Tags

Site of Michiana Star Party 6:
Dr. T.K. Lawless Park ([Map](#))

Star Party Supporters:

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[Celestron](#)

