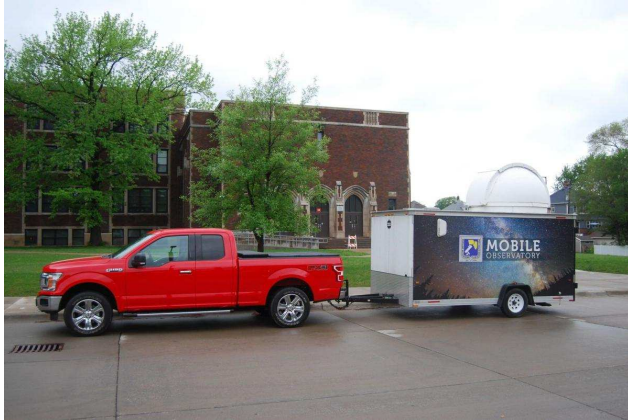


SKYWATCH: A look back, and a look ahead

Paul Levesque Popular Astronomy Club, Jan 2, 2022



2022 will be a busy year for local amateur astronomers.

It's that time again, when we look back at the year just past and look ahead at what the new year might bring us.

As members of the Popular Astronomy Club look back at 2021, they see a year when pandemic restrictions were slowly lifted and public outreach events resumed. During 2021, public events held by the club attracted a total audience of over 1,170 people who saw and learned about the wonders of the night sky.

Along with its regular public observing sessions at Niabi Zoo, PAC held outreach events at venues ranging from local churches and schools to a state recreation area, an alpaca farm, a local library and both the Putnam Museum in Davenport and the Felix Adler Children's Museum in Clinton.

In 2021, PAC also formed a partnership with the Moline School District and held three events at John Deere Middle School. The partnership will continue into 2022, and more events are planned at the school.

At Niabi Zoo and other PAC public observing events, celestial objects seen through telescopes were projected onto video screens, meaning that those attending could share in the experience of viewing the objects and look at them without peering through an eyepiece.

Technology also changed the way PAC holds its monthly meetings, which are now conducted both in person at Moline's Butterworth Center and also virtually via Zoom. This not only opens up the meetings to those who'd rather attend from home but also allows guest speakers to make presentations from remote locations.

So, in 2021, PAC members got to hear from experts from across the nation speaking on interesting topics including astro-archeology (how ancient people observed the night sky), NASA solar missions and the recently launched James Webb Space Telescope. More presentations by experts on astronomy-related topics are planned for 2022.

PAC meetings for 2022 will be held at the Butterworth Center on the second Monday of each month, with two exceptions — in August, when the annual PAC picnic is held, and October, when the club holds its annual banquet.

The public observing sessions held at Niabi Zoo are currently in hibernation for the winter but will resume in March and run through November, on the third Saturday of each month beginning at sunset.

Meanwhile, our friends at the Quad Cities Astronomical Society will hold a number of public sessions at the Menke Observatory, located at the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center in Dixon, Iowa. The observatory is owned by St. Ambrose University and operated and maintained by QCAS in partnership with the university.

May 7 is Astronomy Day, which will be celebrated locally with a daytime open house featuring solar observing and indoor displays at Bettendorf High School and a public observing session in the evening at Menke Observatory. In addition, QCAS will invite the public to observe the Perseid meteor shower at an event scheduled for July 31 at Pleasant Valley Middle School.

Other events are sure to be added to the 2022 agenda, as local organizations request observing sessions and presentations. As you can tell, the Quad Cities has an active, vibrant group of amateur astronomers who enjoy sharing what they see and what they know with others.

Membership in these groups is open to anyone and everyone — you don't need to own a telescope or even know much about astronomy. All you need is an interest in the subject and a desire to learn about the fascinating, beautiful objects that can be found in our Solar System, our galaxy, and our universe.

You can learn more by visiting PAC's website, at <https://www.popularastronomyclub.org/>, and the QCAS website, at <https://www.qcastro.org/>. Both organizations also post announcements and updates on Facebook.

So, in 2022, perhaps you should resolve to take yourself, your family and your friends to a public observing session. Astronomy is for everyone, and local amateur astronomers are eager to share its wonders with you.