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$E=mc^2$

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## Blog

### Michiana Astronomy 2014

Posted by admin on January 15, 2014



In 2014 the Michiana Astronomical Society (MAS) celebrates 40 years of astronomy activities and public outreach. Since its founding in March 1974, the MAS has advanced the diverse interests of amateur astronomers while spearheading celestial opportunities for the entire Michiana community. Positioning itself for the future, MAS recently became incorporated as Michiana Astronomical Society Inc., a 501(c)3 entity.

I encourage you to share your stargazing experiences and MAS memories, which I will post online, as we look back on 40 orbits around the sun. Similarly, please propose the direction you'd like to see public astronomy take in upcoming years. For starters, here's my perspective.

#### 40 Years at Light Speed

I just learned about a new-to-me star--85 Pegasi. It's an obscure double star in the constellation of Pegasus, but I can now find it a heartbeat. It's just inside the Great Square near the star Alpheratz, which Pegasus shares with Andromeda. Click on the [star chart](#), left, to see how readily you, too, can pick out 85 Pegasi.

If you had traveled outward from Earth in 1974 at the speed of light (186,000 miles *per second*), by now you could have reached the bright stars Sirius, Procyon, Altair, Fomalhaut, Vega, Pollux, Denebola, Arcturus, and Rigel. As we mark the 40th anniversary, you'd be passing 85 Pegasi. Next up is Capella. In astronomy, time is distance.

#### The Early Days

I don't have many historical accounts or records of the early days of the astronomy club. Now that the 40th anniversary is upon us, I'm starting to solicit reflections by past members, so please consider penning (or keyboarding) a few paragraphs if you have memories to share.

The predecessor to MAS was the St. Joseph County Astronomical Society, which had been initiated a couple years earlier by several students from Mishawaka High School, per current MAS treasurer Dan Smith. Around the same time there existed the St. Joseph Valley Astronomical Society. Then-member of the latter group Robert Bargmeyer responded to the call and [reflects on his astronomy experiences in Michiana](#).

#### Ten Orbits With MAS

I've been an MAS member for over ten years, and in that time I've seen the group take on many roles. MAS is an incubator of ideas, a facilitator of astronomy education, and a circle of friendly people. Every year MAS members share their enthusiasm for the firmament at parks, libraries, camps, schools, churches, fraternal organizations, and more on a regular basis. Here's a sampling of the multiple events in which MAS and its members have had a role.

#### Telescope Observing

The core activity of the club has always been to get people out viewing. My notes from an informal interview of a veteran MAS member include: "summer of '74 had occultation of Venus by moon, with kids." Ever since its inaugural year, MAS members have been introducing youths to observable changes in the dynamic sky.

#### Public Speakers

Astronomy is a rapidly evolving science driven often by technological advances. Nearly every month the MAS has a speaker at its regular third-Monday meeting at the downtown Mishawaka library to address diverse aspects of astronomy and its complexities. Speakers also delve into historical highlights, current events, observing tips, space mission accomplishments, or research by regional astronomers. The talks are always free and open to the public.

## Star Parties

The MAS has a long history of supporting star parties--overnight observing opportunities that draw attendees typically from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. In its early days, MAS was a key participant in the annual NIAG star party. More recently it has hosted five years of the Michiana Star Party, with the next gathering on May 30-June 1, 2014, at Dr. T.K. Lawless Park in Vandalia, MI.

## AstroCamp

MAS members are key staff of the [AstroCamp](#) program at YMCA Camp Eberhart in Three Rivers, MI. Newly-retired Lou Sandock has built up a program for kids to get out under a dark sky, learn constellations, and get their hands on telescopes. Much of the planning, instruction, and guidance for the week-long adventure comes from the MAS talent pool along with guest AstroCamp counselors.

## Transit of Venus

Michiana was a hub of Transit of Venus activity, both in 2004 and 2012. Leading up to The Big Day in those years, MAS led the community in preparing to witness the solar spectacle. The [Transit of Venus Experience \(TROVE\) page](#) hints at the action, with art exhibits, treasure hunts, a bus tour, historical displays, planetarium programs, musical performances, and much more. The region enjoyed clear skies both times, with thousands of people observing Venus gliding across the sun from multiple sites with solar-filtered telescopes tended by MAS members. Check out how the [community celebrates](#), or visit the [transit of Venus prezi](#) for images that indicate the breadth of community engagement.

## Dark Skies

Dark-sky advocacy is a priority of amateur astronomers, and the MAS has supported and led efforts to minimize the impact of light pollution. During the 2009 International Year of Astronomy, MAS members spearheaded the [Let There Be Night program](#) in which over 3,400 local students contributed observations of Orion to quantify how much of the night sky has already been lost. At telescope observing sessions with the public, MAS members always address dark-sky issues and solutions.

## Telescope Clinics

The MAS invites the public to bring their telescopes, old and new, to learn how to set up and use the equipment efficiently. MAS members make modest repairs and often collimate reflectors. In a portable planetarium they show visitors how to identify constellations and where to find deep sky targets. Additional stations are set up with hands-on activities.

## Comet Festival

Most recently, MAS members coordinated efforts to prepare the community for Comet ISON and its uncertain outcome. Again they initiated art exhibits, a treasure hunt, historical displays, planetarium programs, online news updates, a telescope clinic, all-school assemblies, and much more, as suggested by the [Comet Festival summary](#). Thousands of local students actively participated.

## More...

Simply put, the MAS and its members are "out there." You will regularly find them sharing their time, interests, and insight at the annual ScienceAlive!, at multiple library summer programs, at St. Patrick's County Park programs, at the Northern Indiana Regional Science and Engineering Fair, at the SBCSC AstroFest, in an ETHOS Starlab, in school classrooms, and on a local sidewalk astride a telescope. After the third-Monday regular meetings, you can also find us at a nearby pub.

## Online

Each of three MAS sites has its own uses and audience. I encourage you check in periodically to see what's happening.

- MAS website at <http://www.michiana-astro.org>
- MAS Google Group at <https://groups.google.com/forum/?hl=en&fromgroups=#!forum/MAS-Astro>
- MAS Facebook Group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/194314860621232/>

## 2014 and Beyond

This story remains to be written. The Michiana Astronomical Society Inc. (still dubbed MAS) is charging ahead with a full slate of events for members and the public alike. We are newly minted as a 501(c)3 corporation, so we can accept tax-deductible donations to continue the mission we've performed thus far on a shoestring budget--or less. Please feel free to propose how you would like to see MAS move forward in the coming months and years. We thank you for your contributions of ideas, energy, and financial support.

Thus we begin another orbit around the sun. Or in the light speed analogy, next up is Capella.

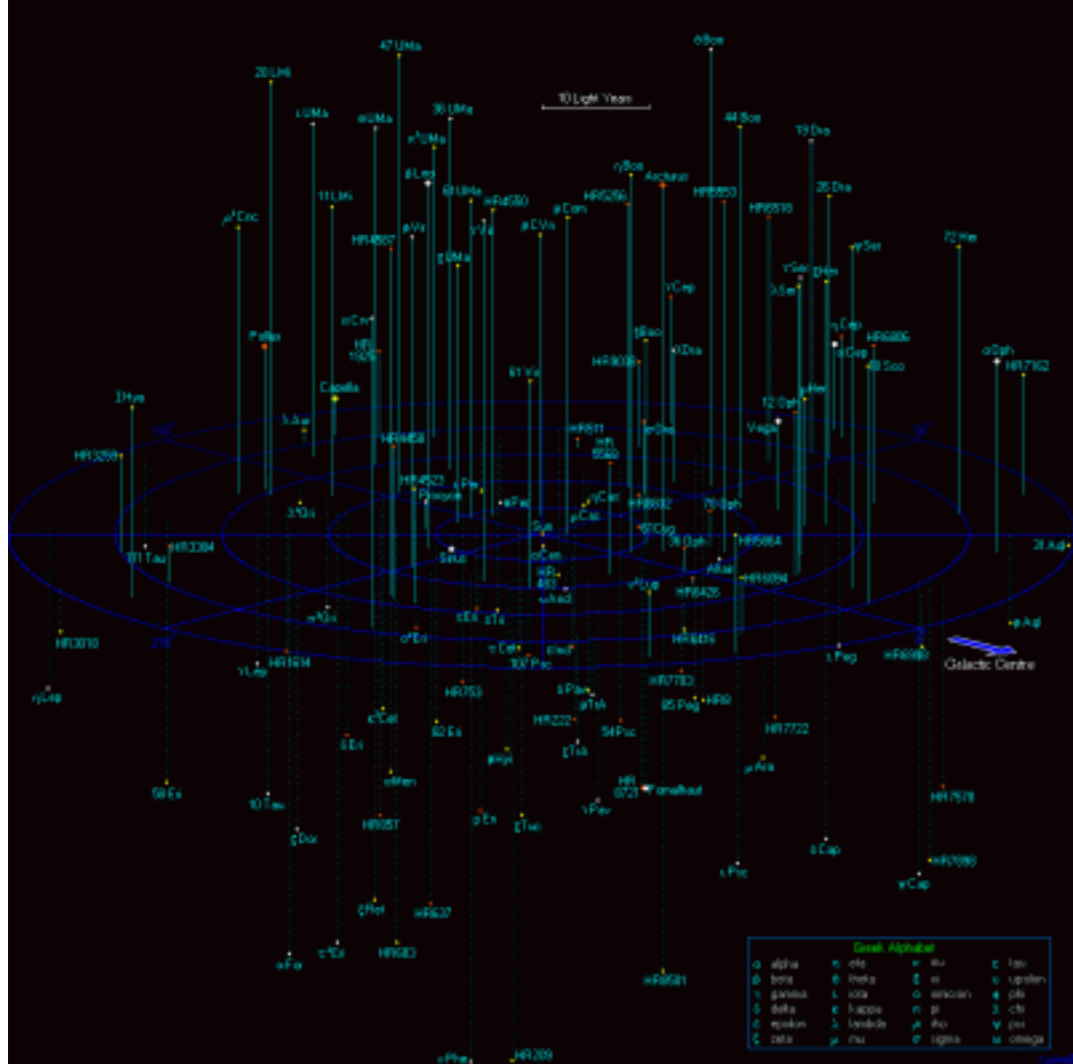


Illustration of stars within 50 light years is courtesy of Richard Powell, <http://www.nightwise.org/blog/michiana-astronomy-2014/>.

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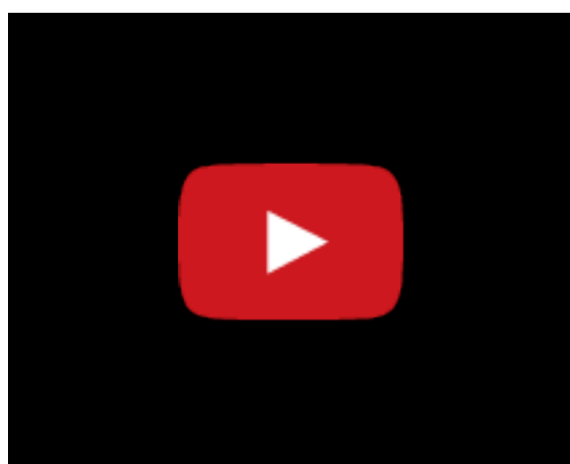
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Tags

## MAS Images

2013 Comet Festival



## 2009 Year of Astronomy



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