

# NC Astronomers

## *Bringing Astronomy to the Public*

**Newsletter – February, 2026**

***All are welcome! Bring a friend!***

### **President's Rant – February 1, 2026**

The Celebration of Life for our beloved **John Griffin** was held on January 12th at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Nevada City. The service order followed the traditional rite from the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church and was led by Fr. Brad Helmuth. The readings, hymns, and prayers were beautiful, and the simple setting of Trinity's sanctuary was ideal for the event.

Instead of having a formal eulogy or homily, the event was opened to a time of sharing in which many friends walked up to the lectern and said what was on their minds and in their hearts. One lady revealed that she was the only person left in the congregation who had attended the Trinity youth group with John! I also didn't realize that John moved to Nevada City with his parents in 1954 when he was only five years old. John and Pam have resided here and have been members of the Trinity community ever since they met while attending college in Oregon.

Another lady was grateful that the service brought together people from three important parts of John's life – his church, his workplace (John worked at Litton Industries for 35 years), and his favorite pastime – astronomy, of course. I was very pleased that nine club members were in attendance. A few of us went up to speak.

**Alan Stahler** recalled the time when they were the only ones that showed up at an impromptu star party at the old Nevada County Airport, way before the current club was formed. They were surprised to be able to see a huge black spot on Jupiter where comet Shoemaker-Levy had just slammed into Jupiter.

**Bill Thomas** mentioned that John was one of the founders of the NC Astronomers club along with himself and Dave Buchla. He said that John was the overwhelming choice for club president for the obvious reasons of leadership skills and especially temperament. The character traits of kindness, honesty and discernment when combined with a heart of service were mentioned in many of the testimonials.

I read my personal recollections of John posted in last month's Rant. Just before leaving home, I had put a copy of it in my back pocket just in case they opened the service to sharing.

A life well-lived! And from Virgil, via a post by Robin Hart,

**Ad Astra, John**

# **It Ain't That Cold!**

## **A Dozen Winter Observing Highlights**

**Rod Brown**

**February 4, 2026**

Think it is too cold to go outside and observe during the winter? Find it easier to watch TV and go to bed early rather than head outside? If so, you are missing out on prime night sky observing! Rod will explain why you should go out and observe during the winter months, discuss how to prepare so you are ready for wintertime conditions, and highlight many of the great things you will see.

Rod grew up ten miles north of Neil Armstrong's hometown of Wapakoneta, Ohio. He watched the moon landings as a small child and regularly visited the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum that was built to honor his hometown hero. However, he always took for granted the Milky Way that was in the sky each night. The interest in space and astronomy he had as a child mostly went dormant in adulthood while he attended college, served as a naval officer, and had a career first in high-tech manufacturing and then transportation planning.

A couple years ago, after his daughter was off to college and he had reduced his work hours on his way to retirement, that interest in the night skies began to reemerge. Now living in Nevada City, he bought a telescope to explore the darker skies that were remote when he lived in the Bay Area. He is now an enthusiastic observer of the faint fuzzies of the deep sky, and he goes out to observe whenever he can.

**NC Astronomers Meets at 7pm on the first Wednesday of the month**  
**Madelyn Helling Library Gene Albaugh Community Room**  
**980 Helling Way**  
**Nevada City, CA 95959**  
**(September – May)**

**\*\* Note \*\***

For the “Summer Season” (July and August) the NC Astronomers will be meeting on-line via Zoom.  
*Club members will receive the keys to the Zoom conference in their email via Groups.io.*

**\*\* NC Astronomers "YouTube" channel \*\***

Many of the presentations are recorded and posted to the club's YouTube channel.

Please see <https://www.youtube.com/@ncastronomers9981/videos>

## Club News – Rod Brown

### Board election to be held at February meeting

Please plan to attend our February meeting to vote for the club board. The current board will stand for reelection:

- Ania Brandysiewcz
- Greg Dolkas
- Greg Ouligian
- Rod Brown

We would be happy to add more board members. If you have interest in serving on the board or in helping the club in any other capacity, please reach out to the board (<https://ncastronomers.org/contact/>).

### Want a telescope for free? Four telescopes available for loan to club members!

Don't have a telescope, but want to try one? Four telescopes are available for loan to club members for a year for free! Currently 11 club members are taking advantage of this benefit, and you could be the next! If you are interested in being that person, please contact Rod at [rodney.et.brown@gmail.com](mailto:rodney.et.brown@gmail.com). We'd love for all of these telescopes to be getting out under the stars again. Here is what is available:



*Celestron C90*, a 3.5-inch Maksutov-Cassegrain reflector. With a 1000mm focal length, it is good for looking at larger, brighter objects in the sky. The loan includes eyepieces, a finder, a dew shield, and a case. Also included is either a camera tripod (easiest to use), an equatorial mount and tripod (more complex but also more flexible to use), or you can use your own camera tripod. The whole setup is compact, light, and portable. (We have three of these telescopes available, all with the same specs but slightly different cosmetics.)

*Orion SkyQuest XT8 Dobsonian*, an excellent reflecting telescope for a beginner or an advanced observer. With eight inches of aperture and 1200mm focal length, it is big enough to take a look at all deep sky objects in the Messier catalog (in addition to the moon and planets) but still be portable. And with a Dobsonian alt-az mount, it is easy to maneuver and requires no complex alignment. It comes with a Telrad finder, eyepieces, and a set of color filters for planetary viewing.



## **Outreach – Ania Brandysiewicz**

Despite of all the odds including a toilet breaking two days before, a sink blocking on the day, virus keeping some people in bed, and finally clouds arriving in the afternoon, and my own back pain, the star party was a great success.

Thank you Greg Ouligian and Rod Brown for letting me have it even when the weather channel predicted a cloudy evening. Special thanks go to Bob Miller for setting up your marvelous telescope, even though nobody believed you will be able to make use of it.

We still had over 45 people that brought a lot of great food. We were in the midst of having a great fun together when Alan Stahler announced that the sky cleared up and Bob is ready to show deep-sky objects. The hit of the evening was Andromeda.

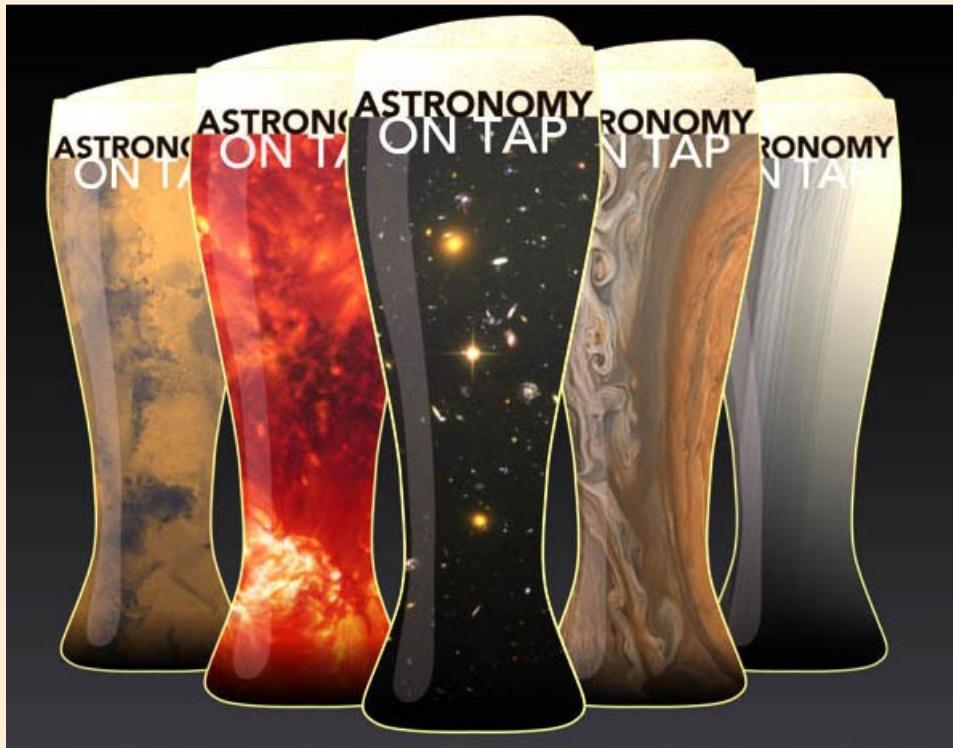
Later Greg Dolkas and Tim White also got their telescopes set up and got a lot of attention.

For next 6 months Alan Stahler will be inviting us to view the Stars off Rt 49 and the Old Donnieville Rd, weather permitting.

I am planning to have another potluck Star Party in October.

Over the next few months our outreach program will be focusing on supporting Star Parties for schools. If anybody has any recommendation and contacts at schools or any other organizations, please let me know. Also if anybody would like to contribute to the outreach program, it will be greatly appreciated.

NC Astronomer members continue to enjoy the beer and blather, which will now be held at the 1849 Brewing Company. The beer selection at the brewery is quite comprehensive and they also have an on-premises cafe for your culinary delight. The environment allows for in-depth conversations on deeply philosophical questions.



Each month we discuss current topics in Astronomy and share our collective ignorance.

## Meeting location:

Astronomy on Tap meets on  
The third Wednesday of the month at 5pm

Come and join the conversation at  
**1849 Brewing Company - 468 Sutton Way in Grass Valley**

# February 2026 Calendar, courtesy of In-the-sky.org:

« February 2026 »

| Sunday  | Monday                             | Tuesday  | Wednesday   | Thursday  | Friday  | Saturday                            |
|---|------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>                           | <b>3</b>   | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>7</b>                            |
| Close approach of the Moon and M44<br>Full Moon             | Lunar occultation of Regulus       | The Moon at aphelion<br>Uranus ends retrograde motion                            |   |   |   |                                     |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>9</b>                           | <b>10</b>  | <b>11</b>   | <b>12</b>   | <b>13</b>   | <b>14</b>                           |
| α-Centaurid meteor shower 2026<br>NGC 2808 is well placed   | Moon at Last Quarter               | The Moon at apogee<br>Lunar occultation of Antares                               |   |   | Lunar occultation of Sigma Sagittarii                               |                                     |
| <b>15</b>   | <b>16</b>                          | <b>17</b>  | <b>18</b>   | <b>19</b>   | <b>20</b>   | <b>21</b>                           |
| The Moon at perihelion<br>Conjunction of Saturn and Neptune |                                    | Comet C/2024 E1 (Wierczchos) passes perigee<br>New Moon<br>Annular solar eclipse | Conjunction of the Moon and Mercury<br>Close approach of the Moon and Mercury<br>Lunar occultation of Mercury | Mercury at perihelion<br>Mercury at greatest elongation east<br>Mercury at dichotomy<br>Messier 81 is well placed<br>Conjunction of the Moon and Saturn | Mercury at highest altitude in evening sky                          | The cluster NGC 3114 is well placed |
| <b>22</b>   | <b>23</b>                          | <b>24</b>  | <b>25</b>   | <b>26</b>   | <b>27</b>   | <b>28</b>                           |
|   | Close approach of the Moon and M45 | Moon at First Quarter<br>The Moon at perigee                                     | Lunar occultation of Beta Tauri   | Conjunction of Venus and Mercury<br>Conjunction of the Moon and Jupiter<br>Close approach of the Moon and Jupiter                                       | Asteroid 7 Iris at opposition<br>The cluster IC 2581 is well placed | Close approach of the Moon and M44  |

## Officers

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| President                  | <a href="#"><u>Greg Ouligian</u></a>      |
| Vice President             | Position open                             |
| Secretary / Treasurer      | <a href="#"><u>Rod Brown</u></a>          |
| Communications Coordinator | <a href="#"><u>Greg Dolkas</u></a>        |
| Outreach Coordinator       | <a href="#"><u>Ania Brandysiewicz</u></a> |

## NC ASTRONOMERS Meets

**First Wednesday Of The Month**  
**Madelyn Helling Library**  
**Community Room**  
**980 Helling Way**  
**Nevada City 95959**

**NC ASTRONOMERS**  
**302 Gethsemane St.**  
**Nevada City, CA 95959**  
**<http://ncastronomers.org>**

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2/1/2026

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