Snake River Skies

The Monthly Newsletter of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society. June 2026

Membership Meeting
May 9th at the Herrett Center, College of Southern Idaho main campus at 7:00pm

Centennial Observatory
See Inside for Details

Faulkner Planetarium
See Inside for Details

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Magic Valley Astronomical Society is a member of the Astronomical League

M-51 imaged by
Rick Widmer & Ken Thomason
Herrett Telescope - Shotwell Camera

June 2026 Vice President's Message

Greetings: Friends and Members. A reminder of our upcoming MVAS meeting on Saturday, June 13th, our former president, Gary Leavitt, will address us. Gary has prepared what will be an excellent presentation. It's entitled: What is next for Artemis and showing some timely Astro tidbits."

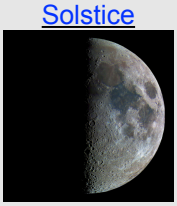
As the month of June is upon us, hopefully it signals a time when we can get out to observe and promote our great hobby. Warmer weather and hopefully clearer skies will make that possible. May hasn't been great weather for observing. In the many years that I have been associated with MVAS, one of my favorite summertime activities has been to meet with friends and other good people at many of our public outreach events such as Castle Rocks,

Just a reminder our summer picnic is scheduled for July 11th at the CSI Herrett Center back patio. MVAS will supply hamburgers and hot dogs, buns and beverages. Members are asked to supply sides, such as salads, desserts, chips, etc. We would like to get started at 6:30pm.

All five bright planets emerge in June, at least for part of the month, but brilliant Venus in particular puts on a spectacular show. It lies close to Jupiter in the western evening sky as the month begins, and the pair passes each other on the 9th during their annual conjunction. Mercury also makes a brief but prominent appearance in the evening sky below Jupiter and Venus. Saturn rises about 2:30 a.m. local time at mid-month – it's always spectacular in a telescope. Mars rises slow and low in the east before sunrise and joins the Moon and Pleiades on the 13th. And North American observers with a pair of binoculars can see the Moon pass in front of Venus in the day lit sky on the 17th – a moderately spectacular event!

Visit our Website
www.mvastro.org

Monthly Event Calendar - June 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 The Moon at aphelion	2 The Great Globular Cluster in Hercules is well placed	3 Summer Solar Session # 2 at the Centennial Observatory 1:30 - 3:30pm	4 Messier 12 is well placed On the 3rd	5	6 Messier 10 is well placed
7 Messier 62 is well placed	8 Moon at Last Quarter 	9 Conjunction of Venus and Jupiter Mercury at dichotomy	10 Conjunction of the Moon and Saturn Summer Solar Session # 3 at the Centennial Observatory 1:30 - 3:30pm	11 Messier 92 is well placed	12	13 MVAS General Mtg. 7:00p at the Herrett Center. Centennial Observatory Star Party
14 Flag Day New Moon Lunation 1280 	15 Asteroid 14 Irene at opposition Mercury at greatest elongation east	16 Conjunction of the Moon and Mercury	17 Summer Solar Session # 4 at the Centennial Observatory 1:30 - 3:30pm Moon/Venus Conjunction	18 The cluster IC 4665 is well placed	19	20
21 Summer Solstice 	22 Moon at First Quarter On the 21st	23 The Lagoon Nebula is well placed	24 Summer Solar Session # 5 at the Centennial Observatory 1:30 - 3:30pm	25	26	27 June Bootid meteor shower 2026 International Asteroid Day Festival!
28 The Moon at apogee	29 Full Moon 	30 On the 29th The Moon at aphelion				

Night Sky this Month – June 2026

While you're out stargazing, if you live at higher latitudes in either hemisphere, look for the electric-blue lacework of noctilucent clouds lighting the sky near midnight. These clouds arise from water vapor frozen onto tiny dust particles from burnt-up meteors in the upper atmosphere and set aglow by a shallow setting sun. It's worth the effort to spot these marvels of the mesosphere.

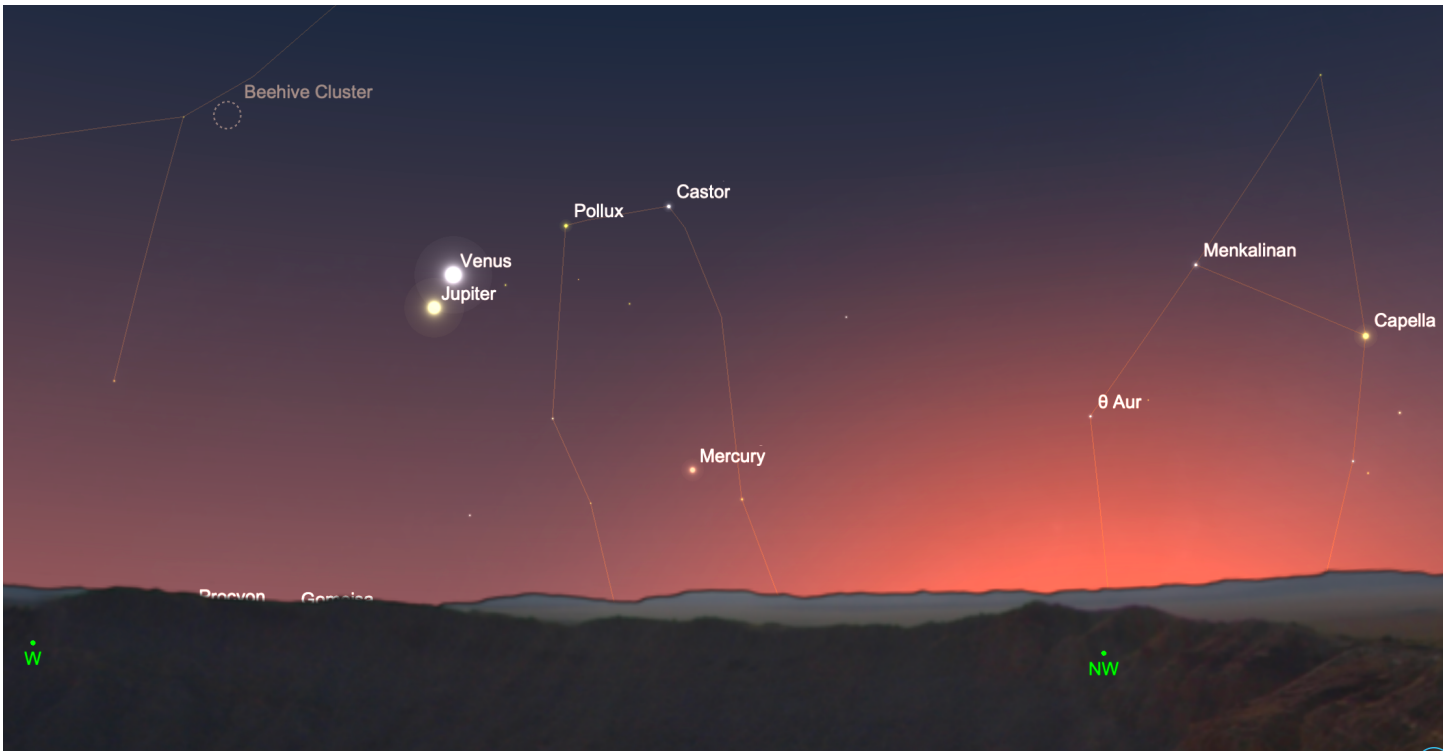
After the Artemis II mission to the Moon concluded, NASA compiled and released thousands of additional photographs from the astronauts on this historic mission. The team at the photo website Petapixel published a few of the finest of these images - they are absolutely breathtaking!

See a meteor photobomb an erupting volcano.

And the astronomy quote of the month:

“No one regards what is before his feet; we all gaze at the stars.”

- Quintus Ennius

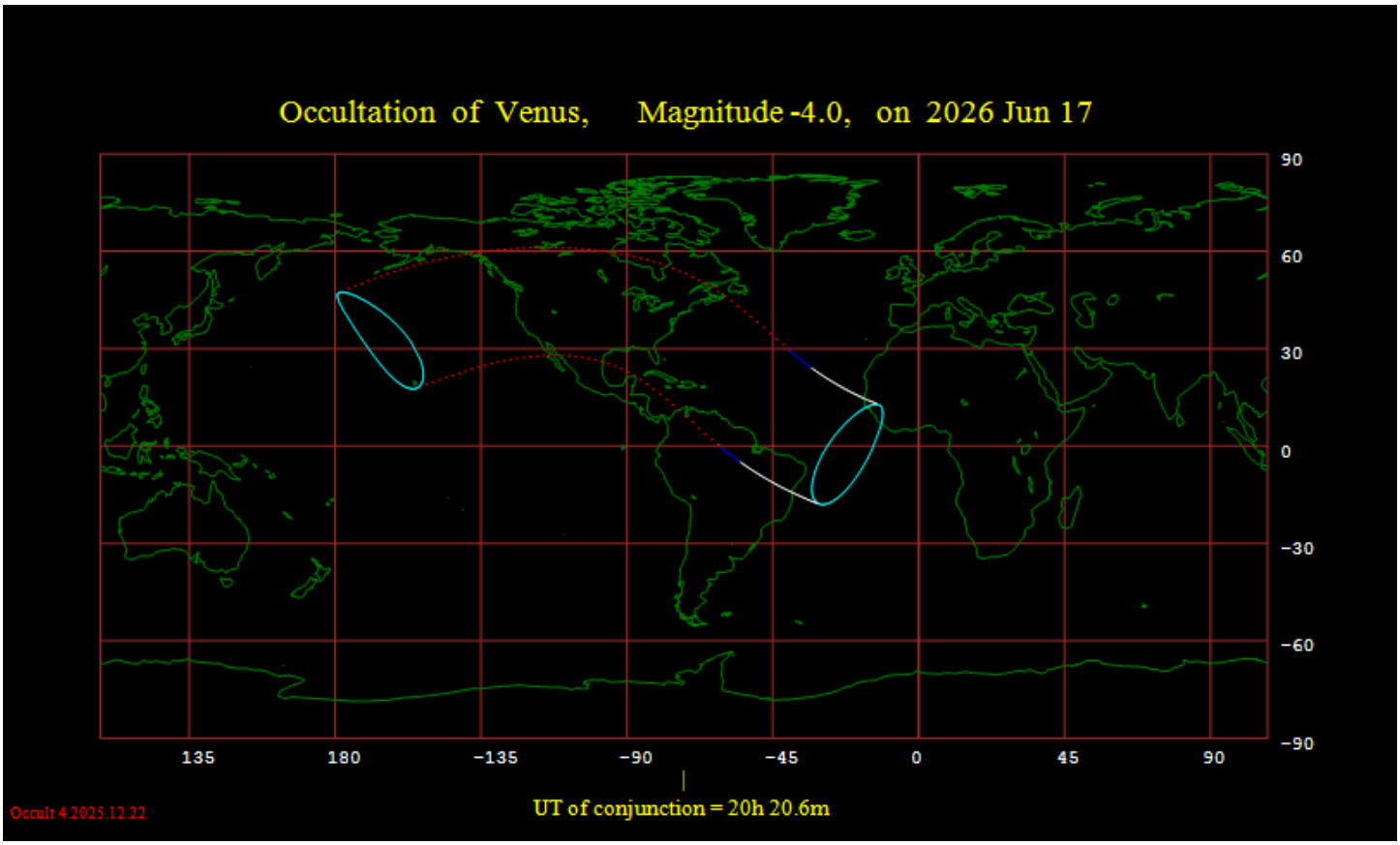


Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury in the west-northwestern sky after sunset on June 9, 2026.

9 June. They’ve been getting closer for weeks, but tonight in the western sky after sunset you see brilliant Venus and Jupiter reach the culmination of their annual meetup. Separated by about 1.5°, the two appear over the west-northwestern horizon with the stars Castor and Pollux off to the north. Look also for Mercury about 13° west of Venus and closer to the horizon. It’s a lovely assembly of bright planets. Venus shines at magnitude -4.0, Jupiter at -1.8, and Mercury at +0.1. Ponder also the disparate distances of these three worlds. Tonight, Jupiter lies at a distance of 900 million km, Venus some 179 million km, and Mercury about 138 million km from Earth. Venus and Jupiter continue in the sky all month, while on June 10th Mercury reaches its maximum height above the horizon and heads back to conjunction with the Sun on June 24.

13 June. A wafer-thin Moon lies about 3° to the west of the Pleiades low over the east-northeastern horizon as dawn arrives in the early morning sky. Binoculars help you see this lovely conjunction in the morning twilight, especially the evident Earthshine on the darkened side of the Moon. Mars, still dim and distant, lies about 8° southwest of the Moon.

15 June. New Moon, 02:54 UT



The path of visibility of the lunar occultation of Venus on June 17, 2026.

17 June. Observers in much of North America can see Venus pass behind the slender crescent Moon during daylight hours. The occultation begins as Venus passes behind the Moon's darkened limb, so the planet will seem to 'disappear' into the clear blue sky. It re-emerges later from the Moon's slender crescent. In a telescope, the planet spans about 28" and its disk appears gibbous with a brightness of magnitude -4.0. Observers in most of North America, the Caribbean, and northeastern Brazil can see this impressive event, weather permitting. This website has detailed timing for hundreds of locations. A pair of binoculars will reveal the whole show, but before and after the occultation, try to see Venus without optical aid in the daytime sky.

Just past their occultation (see above), the Moon and Venus, now separating slowly, remain together about 2.5° apart in the evening sky after sunset in the west-northwest. Grab your binoculars to see the Moon in the same field of view as the Beehive star cluster (Messier 44). Jupiter and Mercury lie to the west. All in all, this makes for some spectacular viewing.

21 June. The Sun reaches its northernmost point on the ecliptic at 08:25 UT. This solstice marks the beginning of summer in the northern hemisphere and winter in the southern hemisphere, and the longest and shortest days of the year, respectively. The video above shows a time lapse of the night sky at summer solstice in Stockholm along with thin noctilucent clouds forming in the north.

24 June. One last bit of action in the western sky after sunset – Jupiter and Mercury are separated by a little less than 4° low over the horizon. Mercury has faded to magnitude +2.2 and presents a challenge for visual observers. Use binoculars and Jupiter itself to locate this little baked world.

29 June. Full Moon, 23:57 UT (The Full Strawberry Moon). Just past apogee, the most distant point in its orbit from Earth, this Strawberry Moon will appear about 7% smaller than average and 14% smaller than a 'super moon'.

Herrett Center for Arts and Science

Centennial Observatory

Upcoming Events
All events are weather permitting

Event	Place	Date	Time	Admission(s)
Summer Solar Session #2	Centennial Observatory	Wednesday, June 3, 2026	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Free
Best evening apparition of Mercury in 2026 & Venus-Jupiter conjunction	Centennial Observatory	Tuesday, June 9, 2026	9:15-9:30 p.m.	Free
Summer Solar Session #3	Centennial Observatory	Wednesday, June 10, 2026	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Free
Monthly Free Star Party	Centennial Observatory	Saturday, June 13, 2026	9:45-11:45 p.m.	Free
Summer Solar Session #4 & close Moon-Venus conjunction	Centennial Observatory	Wednesday, June 17, 2026	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Free
Summer Solar Session #5	Centennial Observatory	Wednesday, June 24, 2026	1:30-3:30 p.m.	Free
International Asteroid Day Festival	Centennial Observatory	Saturday, June 27, 2026	1:00-5:00 p.m.	Free

Faulkner Planetarium

Now Showing

Find Current Shows following the link above. Admission: Adults (ages 18-59): $7.50 Seniors (ages 60+): $6.50 Children (ages 2-17): $5.50 CSI students (w/ activity card): $5.50 Children under age 2: FREE. Buy your tickets online.
*50% discount for Planetary Society members and families.

- Assistive listening devices available upon request.
- Open captioning available upon request for some shows.
- No food, drink, or late entry.
- Dark conditions and audio/visual effects may be too intense for younger children.

Why Stargazing Is Disappearing from American Childhood

There's a question worth sitting with: when was the last time you saw a kid staring at the night sky?
Not at a screen. Not at a game. Just a kid, outside, looking up, quiet. If you're struggling to remember, you're not alone. Something has shifted in American childhood over the past two decades, and most parents can feel it even if they can't quite name it. The nights are the same. The stars are the same. The kids are different. They've come inside.

THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY
In 1970, the average American child spent several hours a day in unstructured outdoor play. By 2010 that number had dropped by more than half, according to research published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. Today it's lower still. The time didn't disappear. It migrated. It went to screens, to scheduled activities, to indoor everything. Night time went first. Darkness used to be a natural invitation to look up. Now it's just the backdrop for a phone. The Milky Way is visible to less than one-third of Americans due to light pollution, according to a 2016 study in Science Advances. And the number of people who'd notice it missing is shrinking faster than the light pollution is spreading. The American Academy of Pediatrics has spent years raising alarms about what they call the "play deficit" which is the loss of child-directed, unstructured time that research consistently links to creativity, resilience, and emotional regulation. Stargazing isn't mentioned by name in their reports. It probably should be.

WHAT WE TRADED AWAY
There's something special about a dark open sky filled with illuminated stars that screens simply can't replicate, no matter how good the graphics get. The night sky is the original unanswerable question. It asks something of you just by being there. How far does it go? What's out there? Are we alone? These aren't questions with Google answers. They're questions that sit with you, that grow with you, that a seven-year-old and a seventy-year-old can stand under together and feel equal. Carl Sagan wrote that the cosmos is within us, that we are made of star stuff. He wasn't being poetic for the sake of it. Every atom of carbon in our bodies was forged in the interior of a star that exploded before our sun existed. When a kid or a parent looks up at the night sky they are, in some very literal sense, looking at where they came from. That's not a fact you can get from a YouTube video. It's something you have to feel outside, in the dark, with the cold air on your face. We traded that for TikTok. That was not a fair trade.

THE ATTENTION ECONOMY'S LONGEST VICTIM
The attention economy doesn't just steal hours. It rewires how attention works. Dr. Gloria Mark at UC Irvine has studied digital interruption for over two decades. Her research found that the average person switches tasks on a screen every 47 seconds. After an interruption, it takes more than 23 minutes to return to full focus. Children's brains, still developing their prefrontal cortex, are more vulnerable to this rewiring than adult brains. Stargazing is almost the exact opposite of a screen. It requires sustained, undirected attention. Nothing is trying to grab your eyes. Nothing refreshes. There are no notifications. The sky just sits there, enormous and patient, and slowly your mind adjusts to its pace rather than the other way around. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that time spent in natural environments, ones that engage what they call "soft fascination," where attention is held gently rather than grabbed forcefully, measurably restores the brain's capacity for focused thought. The night sky is soft fascination at its purest. You can look at it for an hour and still feel like you've rested.

IT DOESN'T REQUIRE EQUIPMENT OR EXPERTISE
Part of why stargazing disappeared is that adults convinced themselves it required something. A telescope. A star map. Knowledge of constellations. A perfect dark sky away from the city. None of that is true.
You need to go outside. You need to look up. You need to stay long enough for your eyes to adjust, which takes about ten minutes, and then the sky you thought was empty starts filling in with detail you didn't know was there. A parent doesn't need to know the name of a single star to make this meaningful. They just need to be willing to stand outside with their kid and say "I don't know" when the questions come, because the questions will come. They always do.

WHAT'S AT STAKE
A generation that doesn't look up is a generation that loses something harder to name than a hobby.
Wonder is not decorative. It's functional. The psychologist Dacher Keltner at UC Berkeley has spent years studying awe. The feeling of being in the presence of something vast that you can't immediately understand. And found that it reduces self-focused thinking, increases generosity, and makes people feel more connected to each other and to time. The night sky reliably produces awe. It has been producing it in human beings for as long as human beings have existed.
When we stop taking our kids outside at night, we don't just lose a habit. We lose a practice of humility. We lose the regular reminder that the universe is enormous and that it's one of the most interesting things about being alive. The stars haven't gone anywhere. They're still out there, every night. The only question is whether we'll go outside to meet them.

Websites and Other Helpful Astronomy Links.

Information on passes of the ISS, the USAF's X-37B, the HST, the BlueWalker 3, and other satellites can be found at http://www.heavens-above.com/

Visit https://saberdoesthe...does-the-stars/ for tips on spotting extreme crescent Moons and https://curtrenz.com/moon.html for Full Moon and other lunar data.

Go to https://skyandtelesc...ads/MoonMap.pdf and https://celestron-si...RReeves-web.pdf and https://nightsky.jpl...ObserveMoon.pdf for simple lunar maps. Click on https://astrostrona.pl/moon-map/ for an excellent online lunar map. Visit http://www.ap-i.net/avl/en/start to download the free Virtual Moon Atlas. Consult http://time.unitariu...moon/where.html for current information on the Moon and https://www.fourmila.../lunarform.html for information on various lunar features. See https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4955 a lunar phase and libration calculator and https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/5187/

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera (LROC) quick map. https://www.universa...ise-and-sunset/

For more on the planets and how to locate them, browse http://www.nakedeyeplanets.com/

Summaries on the planets for each month can be found at https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/

The graphic at https://www.timeandd...lanets/distance displays the apparent and comparative sizes of the planets, along with their magnitudes and distances, for a given date and time.

The rise and set times and locations of the planets can be determined by clicking on https://www.timeandd...stronomy/night/

Click on https://www.curtrenz.../asteroids.html for information on asteroid occultations taking place this month.

Visit http://cometchasing.skyhound.com/ and http://www.aerith.ne...t/future-n.html and https://cobs.si/ for additional information on comets visible this month.

A list of the closest approaches of comets to the Earth is posted at http://www.cometogra.../nearcomet.html

A wealth of current information on solar system celestial bodies is posted at http://www.curtrenz.com/astronomy.html and http://nineplanets.org/

Information on the celestial events transpiring each week can be found at https://stardate.org/nightsky and http://astronomy.com/skythisweek and http://www.skyandtel...ky-at-a-glance/

Free star maps for any month may be downloaded at http://www.skymaps.com/downloads.html and https://www.telescop...thly-Star-Chart and http://www.kenpress.com/index.html

Data on current supernovae can be found at http://www.rochester...y.org/snimages/

Finder charts for the Messier objects and other deep-sky objects are posted at https://freestarcharts.com/messier and https://freestarcharts.com/ngc-ic and http://www.cambridge..._april-june.htm

Telrad finder charts for the Messier Catalog are posted at http://www.custerobs...cs/messier2.pdf and http://www.star-shin...ssierTelrad.htm

Telrad finder charts for the SAC's 110 Best of the NGC are available at https://www.saguaroa...k110BestNGC.pdf

Information pertaining to observing some of the more prominent Messier galaxies can be found at http://www.cloudynig...ur-astronomers/

Author Phil Harrington offers an excellent freeware planetarium program for binocular observers known as TUBA (Touring the Universe through Binoculars Atlas), which also includes information on purchasing binoculars, at http://www.philharrington.net/tuba.htm

Stellarium and Cartes du Ciel are two excellent freeware planetarium programs that are available at http://stellarium.org/ and https://www.ap-i.net/skychart/en/start

Deep-sky object list generators can be found at http://www.virtualcolony.com/sac/ and https://telescopius.com/ and http://tonightssky.com/MainPage.php

Freeware sky atlases can be downloaded at http://www.deepskywa...-atlas-full.pdf and https://www.cloudyni...ar-charts-r1021 and https://allans-stuff.com/triatlas/

For current sky charts visit the NASA Night Sky Network https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/news/212/

McDonald Observatory famous radio program stardate is now a podcast https://stardate.org/podcast

Magic Valley Astronomical Society

550 Sparks St.
Twin Falls, ID

The Magic Valley Astronomical Society (MVAS) was founded in 1976. The Society is a non-profit [501(c) 3] educational and scientific organization dedicated to bringing together people with an interest in astronomy.

In partnership with the Centennial Observatory, Herrett Center, College of Southern Idaho - Twin Falls; we hold regularly scheduled monthly meetings and observation sessions, at which we share information on current astronomical events, tools and techniques for observation, astrophotography, astronomical computer software, and other topics concerning general astronomy. Members enthusiastically share their telescopes and knowledge of the night sky with all who are interested. In addition to our monthly public star parties we hold members only star parties at various locations throughout the Magic Valley.

MVAS promotes the education of astronomy and the exploration of the night sky along with safe solar observing through our public outreach programs. We provide two types of outreach; public star parties and events open to anyone interested in astronomy, and outreach programs for individual groups and organizations (e.g. schools, churches, scout troops, company events, etc.), setting up at your location. All of our outreach programs are provided by MVAS volunteers at no cost. However, MVAS will gladly accept donations. Donations enable us to continue and improve our public outreach programs.

Membership is not just about personal benefits. Your membership dues support the work that the Magic Valley Astronomical Society does in the community to promote the enjoyment and science of astronomy. Speakers, public star parties, classes and support for astronomy in schoolrooms, and outreach programs just to name a few of the programs that your membership dues support.

Annual Membership dues will be:
$20.00 for individuals, families, and $10.00 for students.
Contact Treasurer Jim Tubbs for dues information via e-mail: jtubbs015@msn.com

Donations to our club are always welcome and are even tax deductible. Please contact a board member for details.
Lending Telescopes: The society currently has three telescopes for loan and would gladly accept others please contact President Robert Mayer, for more information on these and other benefits.

Telescopes are an individual thing and not practical for public use. However, everyone should have the experience of a good look at the Moon for at least 5 minutes in their life time. It is a dimension and feeling that is unexplainable. Pictures or TV can't give this feeling, awareness, or experience of true dimension. A person will not forget seeing our closest neighbor, the Moon.

Norman Herrett in a letter to Dr. J. L. Taylor, president of the College of Southern Idaho