
From your Editor

The past few weeks have been hectic at the planetarium. The reception for the Fusion of Art and Science Exhibit at the UNA Art Gallery was barely over before the Symphony "The Planets" was held on March 1st. This was also a busy time for the people at NASA who attempted to launch a satellite to study the CO₂ content in the air. Satellites on rockets are normally covered with a shell which makes up the nose cone of the rocket. The failure of separation of the shell caused the Orbiting Carbon Observatory to not reach orbit. The month also saw delay of the launch of the Shuttle Discovery to help assemble the space station. That launch has been not set to March 11th. Even more troubling was the Feb 10th collision in orbit of a defunct Russian military satellite and a communications satellite. As we launch more things into orbit we can't help but wonder if we are making space into a junkyard. In fact, NASA estimates the largest danger to shuttle launches is impact by space debris!

The month of March is going much better for NASA. The Kepler Mission took off in a spectacular night launch on March 6th. This mission will study a region between the constellations Cygnus and Lyra to look for tiny drops in brightness as earth-sized planets pass between us and their stars. The three-year mission will be the first to tell us how many planets like the Earth are out there orbiting their stars at just the right distance for liquid water to exist. Exciting times are ahead!

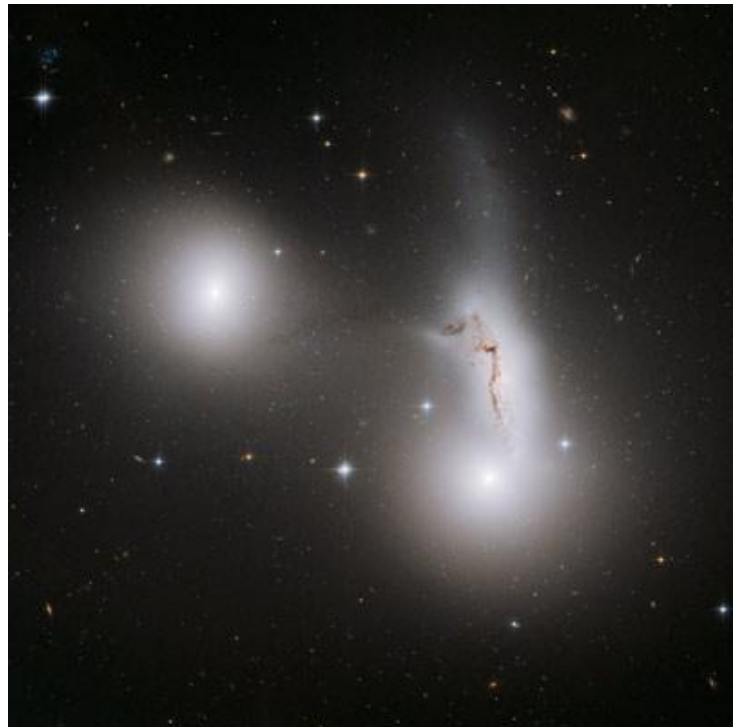
Mel Blake

Director UNA Planetarium and
Observatory.

UNA Planetarium Newsletter

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Image of the Month



The Earth orbits the Sun as part of a giant disk of stars, planets, gas and dust which makes up the Milky Way galaxy. Galaxies are sort of cosmic cities in which most stars lie. Astronomers have discovered that galaxies have fairly violent histories, with small galaxies being "cannibalized" to help form larger galaxies. The Milky Way is currently gobbling up several smaller galaxies. In this Hubble Space Telescope image we see the process from the outside. The galaxies NGC 7173, NGC 7174 and NGC 7176 are seen here in the process of merging 100 million light years away in the constellation Piscis Austrinus. **Image courtesy NASA.**

*Astro Quote: The treasures
hidden in the heavens are so rich
that the human mind shall never be
lacking in fresh nourishment.
Johannes Kepler.*

Observing Highlights

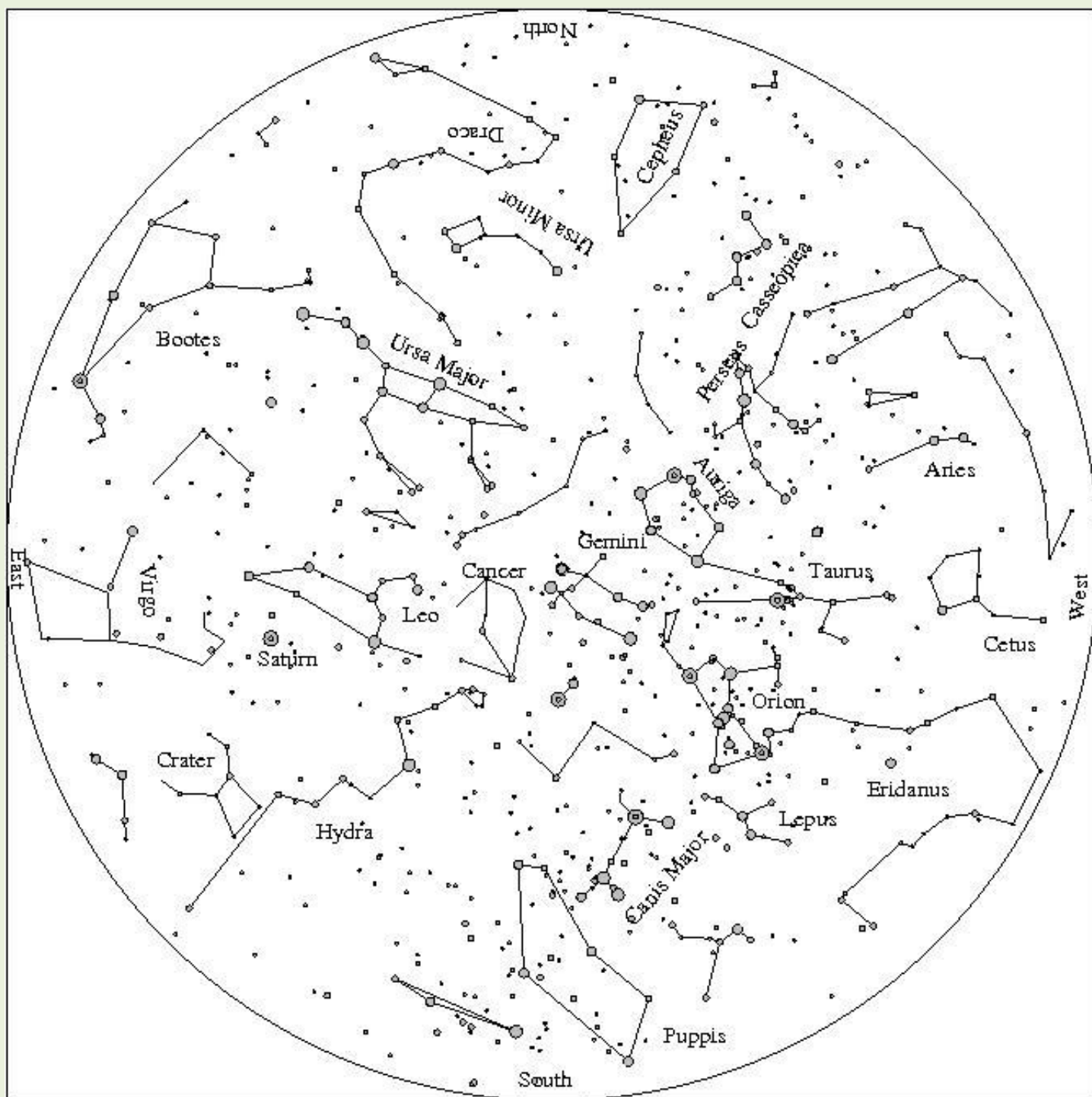
Saturn arrives in the sky this month visible in the eastern sky and lying due south at midnight.

Look for the planet Venus begins to set earlier each day leaving Saturn the lone planet in the sky.

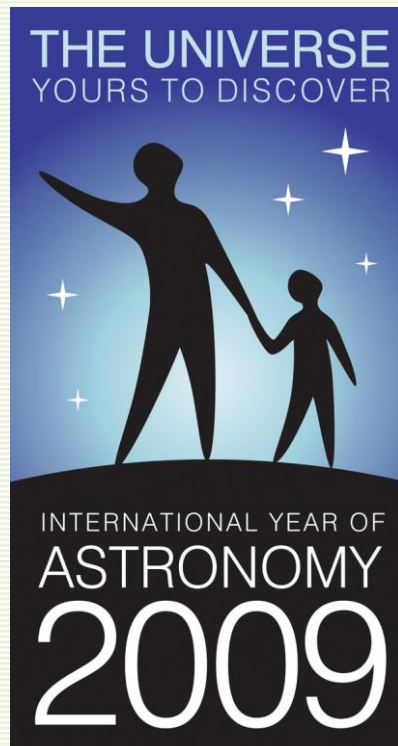
Calendar for Jan. 2009

- Mar. 6th....Kepler Mission Launch
- Mar. 10th. Planetarium Public Night
- Mar. 11th. Shuttle Discovery launch.
- Mar. 17th. Earth at perihelion (closest to Sun).
- Mar. 18th. Alexei Leonov makes first space walk. 1965.
- Mar. 20th. Spring Equinox. First day of spring.
- Mar. 26th. Shoals Astronomy Club Meeting 7:00PM. UNA Planetarium.
- Mar 31st. Planetarium Public Night.

The March 2009 Sky for North Alabama



How to use this Chart: The sky is shown for 8:00PM, March 15th for Florence, Alabama. It will appear this way one hour earlier for each week difference in time. The stars brightness's are represented by different sized dots. The faintest stars you can see are the small dots; the brightest ones are large dots. Hold the chart with the direction you are facing down. So if you are facing north, hold the chart with north down. The circle represents the horizon and the center of the chart the point directly over your head. So an object half-way between the center and edge of the chart is half-way up in the sky. This chart was prepared using the SkyNow software of R. M. Blake. This chart may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes with the following acknowledgement included: Courtesy UNA Planetarium and Observatory. <http://www.una.edu/planetarium/>.



UNA Projects and Initiatives

The UNA Art Gallery and UNA Planetarium and Observatory
PRESENT THE
International Year of Astronomy Art and Science Exhibit

The Exhibit includes: Space inspired Artwork
Images from the Hubble Telescope
Meteorites and Space models

It is a true fusion of art and science that can be enjoyed by anyone!
The exhibit begins February 2, 2009 and continues until March 20, 2009.
Reception 4:00 p.m. February 19, 2009

Presented by the
DEPARTMENT of ART and DEPARTMENT of PHYSICS and EARTH SCIENCE
University of NORTH ALABAMA

100 Hours of Astronomy

The 100 hours of astronomy project is an international effort to have 100 continuous hours of public outreach and education for astronomy between April 2nd and 5th. UNA Planetarium will collaborate with the Shoals Astronomy Club to do sidewalk astronomy events and planetarium programs. Look for times in the April newsletter.

Year of Astronomy Fusion of Art and Science Exhibit

The UNA Art Gallery held its reception for the exhibit in February 19th. The exhibit will continue to show through March 20th. Attendance for the exhibit has been brisk and feedback very enthusiastic, according to gallery director Prof. Chiong-Yiao Chen. The students have put together provocative and stunning sculptures and images. If you have not seen it, check it out. It is open 8:00AM – 4:30PM, Monday - Friday.

“The Planets” Symphony

The performance of the symphony “The Planets” by Holst was met with good response by the audience on March 1st. The collaborative project involved a movie of each planet and a movie of Hubble images led by music from Holst and “Star Wars”. It was one of the largest audiences for a symphony at the Shoals Theater. It was a pleasure to collaborate on this project and meet some of the talented students and musicians in the Symphony. The next Shoals Symphony performance is May 2nd at 7:00PM. May 2nd is International Astronomy Day!

Rehearsal for “The Planets”.

