**2021-2022 Annual Report**

**Name of Region:** Mid East
**Name of Regional Chair:** Don Knabb (dknabb01@comcast.net)

**Name of Regional Representative:** Dr.Al Lamperti (lamperti@temple.edu)

**Name of Regional Vice-Chair:** Howard Dew (glarg291@yahoo.com)

**Name of Regional Secretary:** Janet Rush, M.D. (rushje@comcast.net)

**Name of Regional Treasurer:** Dr. Dan Chrisman (danchrisman@gmail.com)

**Region Goals for the Year:**

Continue the on-line presence with the MERAL website and Facebook page.

Continue to share communications from the Astronomical League to MERAL clubs.

Provide a listing of all MERAL regional events on the MERAL website.

Provide various items of interest to MERAL clubs such as monthly sky guides from the AL and Night Sky Network newsletters.

Hold Zoom events for especially interesting presentations.

Encourage new club members to pursue the Northern Constellation Hunter Program across all MERAL clubs.

**Notable Regional Activities and Events:**

The MERAL website has experienced nearly 600 “hits” during the past year, with over 400 being new visitors. The MERAL Facebook page has 112 followers. The MERAL website provides links to all MERAL clubs, links to the Astronomical League and numerous outreach resources.

During late 2021 and the first half of 2022 MERAL clubs began holding in-person meetings and outreach events.

An online presentation was made to all MERAL clubs from the Chester County Astronomical Society. This presentation was “NASA Returns to the Moon!” by Mr. Brian Matisak, deputy manager of the Systems Engineering and Integration Office for the Space Launch System (SLS) Program at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. This presentation set an attendance record for the Chester County Astronomical Society and the recording has been viewed over 400 times.

During the past year, the MERAL chair passed along numerous announcements from the Astronomical League to member clubs, notices of Night Sky Network webinars and the monthly Observing Guides from John Goss.

A listing of all regional star gazing events was shared with all MERAL Presidents and ALCors.

At the suggestion of Howard Dew, MERAL vice chair, MERAL provided a set of binoculars and a binocular observing book to Star Quest for the youth raffle. Putting these items in the youth raffle was Al Lamperti’s idea, to encourage young astronomers. The MERAL chair provided six astronomy theme hand-turned pens to the regular raffle.

No annual meeting was deemed necessary in 2021 and none was held at Star Quest due to none of the officers being in attendance.

The MERAL banner was displayed at the York County Star Party and the MERAL chair provided a presentation to the star party attendees.

At the suggestion of Phil Whitebloom, President of the Howard Astronomical League, we created an initiative in which all MERAL clubs could participate. This turned out to be encouraging all new members in MERAL clubs to pursue the Astronomical League Northern Constellation Hunter Program. To this end a presentation on the program and an improved log sheet was created and shared with all MERAL clubs. Zoom presentation of the materials was made to several MERAL clubs by the MERAL chair.

**Election of Officers:**

We are due to hold elections in late 2022. Notice will be sent to all MERAL clubs to determine if anyone is interested to run for an office. If no one expresses interest, I am pleased to report the current officers will continue in their roles

**Treasurer’s Report from Treasurer Dan Chrisman:**

MERAL Financial Report (7/1/2022):

MERAL Treasurer Report 2021-2022

Mid East Region of the Astronomical League

Account Name: "Astronomical League Mid East Region"

Wells Fargo Essential Business Checking

Account # 200 000 481 0401

2021-2022 Fiscal Year

Initial Balance: 7/01/2021: $2,098.92

Final Balance: 6/30/2022: $1,855.01

Activity (1 check):

1) Check #1004, 11/12/2021, $243.91. [Note: Wells Fargo Transaction date: 11/18/2021]

Payable to Don Knabb, MERAL Chairperson, reimbursement for his payment for 2021-2022 MERAL website: Wix.com:

a) Premium Plan Unlimited, Invoice #964297217, Nov 4, 2021, $228.96.

b) Domain, “meralastronomy.org”, Invoice #961755795, Oct 19, 2021, $14.95.

These fees were paid by Don Knabb: $243.19. The cost increase from 2020-2021 is due to the loss of the “first year 50%” plan discount and the loss of the “first year free” domain name fee.

**Reports from MERAL clubs are included below. Highlights include:**

1. From John Goss, Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society, a discussion of how to handle donated telescopes from the community.
2. Also, from John Goss thoughts on building new club leadership.
3. From Harold Goldner, Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers, their newsletter now reaches 800 people.
4. The Howard Astronomical League donated a telescope to one of the Howard County, MD libraries that was awarded to them by the Astronomical League.
5. The Charlottesville Astronomical Society experienced a wealth of remote guest speakers from around the world including astronomers form Keck and ALMA and scientists from Astronomy Magazine, The Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, the Smithsonian in Washington and NASA Wallops Island.
6. As we are seeing in many clubs, the Westminster Astronomical Society has seen a dramatic increase in membership with current membership up 60%.
7. The Northern Virginia Astronomy Club continues to schedule monthly public viewing events that usually draw upwards of 100-200 guests and they also support Sky Meadows State Park's monthly "Astronomy for Everyone" events that take place rain or shine. These tend to be larger draws of 200-300 people.

**REPORTS FROM MERAL CLUBS**

**Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society, from John Goss, President**

1. A common problem, a common opportunity - A common problem for many clubs is one that they are probably not aware of, but an important one, nevertheless. Clubs are often thought in the community as being a depository of used telescopes that the public doesn’t want anymore. Since 100 million telescopes populate the country, most of them not “high end,” more of them will be coming!

What to do? A great year-end community service project.

Clubs tend to become a focal point as a depository for small telescopes donated from members and from the community. Many of these are entry level telescopes and are of little interest to club members. As a result, they often languish, becoming “white elephants” to the club. Why not put those used, but usable small scopes to good use?

Contact community service organizations (Church, civic, and government social service agencies) for the names of young people who might be interested in receiving a small, but usable telescope. That just might be the spark that a young person needs to enter this incredible hobby and begin his or her journey into the celestial realm!

Make sure the telescope is in good working order:

• Does it have two clean eyepieces of different focal lengths that have the correct barrel diameter?

• Are the optics collimated?

• Is the tripod too wobbly to be of use?

• Do the slow-motion knobs, if it has them, function smoothly?

• Is the finder scope aligned?

• Is it balanced?

• Are all the mounting bolts tight and do the polar axes swing smoothly?

• Does it have a clear warning about not observing the sun?

Ask yourself, “Will this scope be too frustrating for a young person to use?”

Resist the temptation to clean the optics unless they are very dirty. Don’t do so unless you know how to do it.

Before placing it for adoption, test it on observing the moon, Jupiter or Saturn. Any unusual difficulties then will become apparent.

2. Building new club leadership

The most important task for a club officer is not widely recognized: Finding his or her replacement.

Organized Amateur Astronomy: Help needed. Hobby clubs need new volunteers to fill officer and program/project positions. To remain successful clubs must stay on top of the issue, making sure qualified people step forward when the need arises.

How many times are there not enough people stepping forward to fill various offices? How can we ensure that qualified people do?

Why people don’t volunteer

A. Never volunteer for anything.”

B. Intimidated by the position.

C. Feel that they don’t have the time to do the job well.

D. Didn’t join the club to be an officer.

E. Don’t want to be part of the election process.

All these points indicate that when discussing upcoming elections or open positions, several concerns need to be addressed:

• Emphasize what knowledge is needed, and the time commitment that is required.

• Make apparent that many of the club members could fill the role and that being an officer or other volunteer is rewarding – and fun.

• Note that one function of the Nominating Committee is to encourage those folks who really want to be an officer, and to ensure that no one is embarrassed by losing an election.

Don’t wait for an election to approach. Try to encourage people to be active during the monthly meeting. How to do this? Examine past rosters to see who has attended at least 6 meetings in the past 12 months. From that group, ask one of them to prepare a few remarks about an astronomy topic of their choosing for the meeting – less than 5 minutes is sufficient, 10 minutes is too long. It needn’t be too technical or in depth. Do this every month. After their talk, thank them in front of everyone. After a few months, recognize again everyone who has contributed in this manner.

Why do people volunteer in hobby clubs?

• Someone asks them.

• They saw a need and stepped in.

• They wanted to be more involved and took a chance.

This is an issue that the RVAS will continue to pursue.

3. Limericks - As was done, last year the Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society held a limerick reading by members on the year’s final meeting in December. This was met with enthusiasm by club members.

4. Presenting Observing Program Pins through Zoom - Here is something we tried with some amusement as we did last year: a magical, head–scratching method of presenting AL observing awards during Zoom meetings.

• It is always nice to present an observing award pin and certificate in person during a club meeting because it generates enthusiasm. If the person who presents the award already has the correct pin of his/her own then,

• Have the AL award coordinator send the observing pin and certificate directly to the awardee.

• During the presentation ceremony on Zoom, have the presenter hold the pin he/she owns close to the camera so the members can see and admire its design.

• After saying the appropriate words recognizing the achievement of earning the award, the presenter then appears to hand the pin to the camera.

• The awardee, with his/her pin hidden from view, appears to reach towards the camera for the pin from the presenter.

• As the awardee’s hand moves away from the camera, it now holds the pin. The recipient shows it to the camera.

The pin was impossibly handed off through Zoom. Members will be asking, “How did they do that? “The magic of Zoom!” That’s how!

5. Return to in person meetings? How to handle meetings after the virus protocols subside? Some members will want to meet in person again, while other will still want to meet virtually. Does this mean that both scenarios will need to be done? As the year progresses, this issue will be decided.

**Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh from Terry Trees**

The Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh has returned to star parties for the public. Our monthly members meetings are still on-line only.

**Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers from Harold Goldner, President**

DVAA has maintained membership levels throughout the year despite the ramifications of the pandemic. We have returned to our regular format for star parties and have even been able to beat the clouds a few times to go forward with stargazing at Valley Forge Park.

We have published our newsletter monthly including member astrophotography, how-to’s and observing tips using a rotating editorial committee which has been quite effective in distributing the burden as well as freshening the content. Our newsletter enjoys a circulation of over 800, up over 100 from last year.

We returned to live General Meetings in April and have added streaming to the mix for those who cannot attend in person, most recently “simulcasting” the meeting over YouTube in June. We look forward to another meeting at Fort Washington State Park in August, as well as several outreach opportunities with local colleges, libraries and schools.

Finally, rentals of our astronomy equipment have been lively now that we have updated, repaired and thoroughly inventoried our supply of telescopes, eyepieces, and other equipment.

Al Lamperti reports that at least 2 women members of the DVAA are continuing their pursuit of A.L. Observing Programs.

**Chester County Astronomical Society from Don Knabb, Observing Chair and Treasurer**

Throughout the 2021 -2022 period we saw a steady increase in membership to what is now a record level of 148 members.

We developed a method to have in-person meetings that were live-streamed through Zoom and on YouTube. There were a few technical challenges, but we eventually sorted out all the details. Using Zoom we were able to have remote presenters from JPL projected onto the large screen in our meeting room and live streamed to members who were at home.

In-person public outreach events started in early 2022.

**Howard Astronomical League from Phil Whitebloom, President**

We saw this past quarter getting back to some kind of "normalcy" relative to COVID-19. Our monthly public and members only star parties have been well attended. Some even had excellent skies. A few were the victims of overcast and rain. We have had several "impromptu" star parties. Two of them were in the early morning hours to watch the planet conjunctions and one was to view and image the alignment of all the planets including the Moon. In addition, we had an event where we formally donated a telescope to one of the Howard County, MD libraries that was awarded to us by the Astronomical League. We continue to add new capabilities to our 6" Takahashi refractor inside our observatory. We now have enough certified telescope operators to cover our needs for the membership and public when it comes to utilizing the observatory (HALO - Howard Astronomical League Observatory). Our membership continues to grow as we are over 360 members of which over 260 are family memberships. We have had excellent speakers for our monthly meetings, and we have the remainder of 2022 already scheduled with guest speakers.

We very much appreciate the information that is provided to us by MERAL and the resulting feeling of community with all the other astronomy clubs in the region.

**Charlottesville Astronomical Society from Steve Layman, President and Director of Outreach**

During Covid the Charlottesville Astronomical Society held meetings via zoom and did almost no outreach or group observing. We had a wealth of guest speakers from around the world including astronomers form Keck and ALMA and scientists from Astronomy Magazine, The Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, the Smithsonian in Washington and NASA Wallops Island. I found that it was easy to find guest speakers throughout the astronomy community ounce everyone was comfortable with zoom meetings. In 2022 as things opened, the club decided to go to a hybrid format with some members still participating via zoom while others are live in the classroom at the McCormick Observatory on the grounds of the University of Virginia. Our membership is up over 120 as lots of folks seem to have been bitten by the astronomy bug during the pandemic.

The club is back to doing outreach at Big Meadows in the Shenandoah National Park, Ivy Creek Natural Area in Albemarle County, two sites in Nelson County – south of Charlottesville and Group Nights at the McCormick Observatory. We have also established an observing site at a brewery south of Charlottesville. We have participated in a Cub Scout Aviation Day and a Kid-Vention Science Day this spring.

Our club growth has included several high-quality astro imagers who constantly treat us to amazing new views of the heavens, and we have a robust mentoring program for both adults and kids. Our most difficult challenge is the weather in Central Virginia, but most nights will find many of our members looking up.

**Westminster Astronomical Society from Laurie V. Ansorge, Treasurer**

WASI resumed in-person meetings as hybrids in December using Zoom. This format has facilitated speaker participation from as far away as Australia and provided a means for nearby clubs to benefit as well. The county planetarium that we share experienced malfunction so shows won't resume until September 2022. However, the monthly star parties that ordinarily occur after the planetarium show resumed in May. Other outdoor outreach activities have resumed with increased participation.

Maintenance is occurring on the dome of the observatory containing the 14" SCT and internet connectivity between the observatory and planetarium has been achieve for broadcasting observations. Plans on an additional observatory in a nearby town have resumed.

Membership has taken an upturn from a low of about 50 to over 80 at time of this writing. A refresh of outreach volunteers is occurring with newer members filling rolls from retiring members. Members are reconnecting after COVID distancing. WASI was featured in the Carroll County Magazine, June issue.

**Northern Virginia Astronomy Club from Brad Payne, ALCOR**

NOVAC continues to schedule monthly public viewing events that usually draw upwards of 100-200 guests. Weather did put a damper on our largest events, the October Star Gaze and our May Astronomy Day with the former being cancelled, and the latter being rescheduled to the rain date with a less ambitious program. NOVAC volunteers also support Sky Meadows State Park's monthly "Astronomy for Everyone" events that take place rain or shine. These tend to be larger draws of 200-300 people. Our monthly meetings continue to be virtual in the post-COVID world, but one of our guest speakers was Phil Harrington back in January as well as prominent NASA scientists discussing current events.

Brad Payne, NOVAC ALCor has been "marketing" various AL programs, trying to engage club membership.