

# ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

VOL. 53, No. 1 – JANUARY 2005

## SFAA Annual Awards Dinner . Saturday, January 22, 2004

6:00 p.m. - No-host Bar 7:00 p.m. - Dinner

Basque Cultural Center . 599 Railroad Ave . South San Francisco . (650) 583-8091

### Keynote Speaker DR. DEBRA FISCHER

San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley

Dr. Debra Fischer is an astronomer at San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley. Since 1997, she has been a member of the planet-hunting team led by Geoff Marcy and Paul Butler. Together, this team has discovered or co-discovered the majority of the over-100 known planets orbiting stars other than the Sun, making it the most prolific planet-hunting team in history. While Marcy and Butler observe primarily at Keck, Dr. Fischer conducts the planet search at nearby Lick Observatory, where she observes 400 stars with the 3-meter Shane Telescope and the 1-meter Coude Auxiliary Telescope.

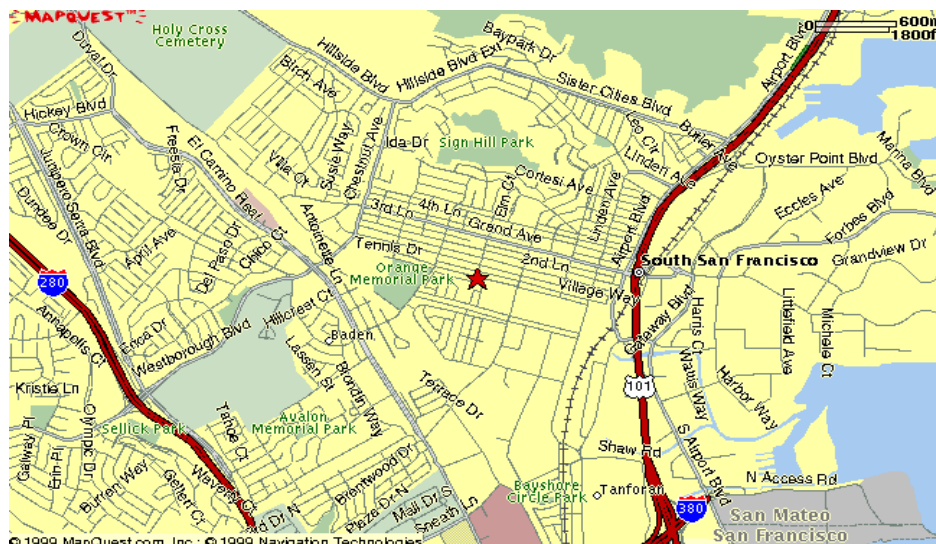
#### Menu Choices

*Prime Rib with Scalloped Potatoes & Vegetables (\$32.50) . Breast of Chicken Chasseur with Vegetables & Rice (\$23.50)*

*Vegetarian Pasta (\$20.50)*

*Soup, salad, bread & butter, ice cream and coffee included. Tax and gratuity included.*

Please send a check or money order (made out to San Francisco Amateur Astronomers), along with your choice of entrée, to SFAA at P.O. Box 15097, San Francisco CA 94115 by **January 5, 2005** Any requests received after **January 5, 2005** cannot be guaranteed.



**Basque Cultural Center From Highway 280:** Take Highway 280 North to the Avalon Drive Exit in South San Francisco. Continue on Junipero Serra Blvd. to Westborough Blvd. Turn right and proceed to El Camino Real. Turn right; proceed to Orange Blvd. Turn left and proceed to Railroad Ave. Turn right. Continue to 599; turn right into parking lot.

From San Francisco, take Highway 280 South. From Highway 280, take the Westborough Exit, following the same directions as above after Westborough Blvd.

**Basque Cultural Center From Highway 101:** Take Highway 101 North to South San Francisco Grand Avenue Exit, turn right. Turn right on East Grand Ave., then left on Grand Ave. Turn left on Magnolia and proceed for two blocks. Cross Railroad Ave. into the Basque Cultural Center parking lot.

From San Francisco, take Highway 101 South to the Grand Ave. Exit in South San Francisco. Continue on Grand Ave. Turn left on Magnolia and proceed two blocks. Cross Railroad Ave. into the Basque Cultural Center parking lot.

## 2004 CLUB OFFICERS & CONTACTS

President	Michael Portuesi	(415) 550-9366
Vice President	Nancy Cox	(415) 269-8259
Secretary	James Mace	
Treasurer	Lorrie Boen	
Speaker Chair	Linda Mahan	
City Star Party	Randy Taylor	(415) 255-8670
Membership & Subscriptions	Lorrie Boen	
Bulletin		
Editor-in-Chief	Phil Estrin	(415) 703-4533
Associate Editor	Annette Gabrielli	(415) 703-4539
Telescope Loans	Pete Goldie	(415) 206-9867
Honorary Director	John Dobson	
Board Members	Jim Webster	
	Steve Bryson	
	Danny Christian	
	Cheryl Schudel	
	Ken Frank	
	Slava Evanikoff	
	Randy Taylor	
Alt. Board Members	John Dillon	
	Phil Estrin	
Webmaster	Joe Amato	

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### MEMBERSHIP DUES

The mailing label on the back of this issue shows the month and year through which your membership was paid. If the date has passed, your membership has expired. Members may receive no more than one bulletin after the expiration of membership.

Please renew soon if your membership is expiring.

### ONLINE SERVICES FOR SFAA MEMBERS



The SFAA's Secretary's Web Site helps keep SFAA information together and accessible to members. The site URL is <http://www.whiteoaks.com/sfaa/>. At this site you can find such information as minutes from meetings of the Board of Directors, the SFAA official by-laws, and other information. SFAA also offers email lists to supplement the bulletin board offered at the SFAA's official web site. At present there are two email lists – an unmoderated list for use primarily for business and discussion by the Board of Directors (but open to all members), and a moderated announcement list for all SFAA members. If you would like to be added to the SFAA-announce email list, please contact the secretary (<mailto:secretary@sfaa-astronomy.org>) and let him know. You can also sign up for the list yourself at this URL: <http://www.whiteoaks.com/mailman/listinfo/sfaa-announce>

## CLUB TELESCOPES

The SFAA owns 4 club loaner telescopes, Dobsonian/Newtonian reflectors: 6" f/10, 8" f/7, and 10" f/8 and a Starblast. They are available for extended periods (30 days or more) to SFAA members. These are generally very fine scopes, easy to use and well-suited for deep sky, planets, and star parties. The loaner custodians are Pete Goldie & Sarah Szczechowicz, located in San Francisco. If you are interested in borrowing a scope, or if you have items you can donate for the loaner program (eyepieces, star maps/books, collimator, etc.) please contact them via email (<mailto:pg@lbin.com>) or phone (415-206-9867). Email communication is preferred and strongly recommended for a quick and accurate reply.



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### CLUB ASTRONOMY VIDEOS

The SFAA owns a series of astronomy videotapes featuring Alex Filippenko, a world-renowned professor of astronomy at UC Berkeley. The videotapes provide an introduction to astronomy and cover topics such as the Solar System, the lifecycles of stars, the nature of galaxies, and the birth of the Universe. The SFAA loans the tapes free to all members. If you are interested in viewing these tapes, you may check them out at any of the SFAA General Meetings. These tapes were kindly donated to the SFAA by Bert Katzung. Our librarian is Dan Christian.



For information on the course tapes themselves:

<http://www.teach12.com/ttc/assets/courseDescriptions/180.asp>

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*Above the Fog* is the official bulletin of the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers. It is the forum in which club members may share their experiences, ideas, and observations. We encourage you to participate by submitting your articles, announcements, letters, photos and drawings. We would also like to hear from our new members. Tell us about yourself – what you have done in the past and what other clubs you have joined. The deadline for the next issue is the seventh day of the month. Send your articles to Phil Estrin at [pestrin@dir.ca.gov](mailto:pestrin@dir.ca.gov).

## **FROM YOUR PRESIDENT**

Michael Portuesi

It's New Year's Eve as I write this column, and the end of 2004 also marks the end of my tenure as President. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the people who made my term as President a rewarding and affirming experience.

I'll start with Phil Estrin and Annette Gabrielli, who co-edit and produce this newsletter. They've done well coping with the text and pictures I send them, and turning it into something nice for the newsletter.

Joe Amato, our Webmaster, deserves a round of applause for moving the website to a new hosting provider, and providing us with a faster website and a spiffy bulletin board in the process.

A note of appreciation goes to Pete Goldie and Sarah Szczechowicz for their continuing support of the Telescope Loaner program, and for accepting the piles of junk we keep pushing on them.

Tinka Ross deserves recognition for her work with MTIA in organizing the Mount Tam star parties. Steve Bryson gets my undying appreciation for acting as SFAA's representative with the State Parks, when they wanted to change the rules governing our access to the mountain.

Danny Christian has supported our video library and new members program with cheerfulness and a smile, and he's always the first to volunteer with setup and takedown at the general meetings. He's frequently first in line to volunteer for Mount Tam events.

Outside SFAA, I'd like to warmly thank Ranger Bob Holloway of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area for being so supportive of the City Star Parties. He is being reassigned to the Marin Headlands for 2005, and so we will all miss him deeply.

Stacey Jo McDermott gets a nod for her support of the City Star Parties, and for being a frequent speaker. Toney Burkhart and Renita Mock kept the City Star Parties going, independent of SFAA, through the summer months.

Though Bob Berta has moved to Michigan, I am touched by his heartfelt support of the club when it faced a crisis of leadership. He gets a special "thank-you" for remaining a "expatriate" member of the club in 2004. Bob, along with club members Norman Mahan, Geoff Collins and Bert Katzung, also graciously shared their astrophotography with me to use in public outreach talks. Thanks to all of you.

Though also "expats" in 2004, Jane Houston Jones and Morris Jones get rounds of thank-yous from me. Mojo, for bringing the SFAA board into the digital age and still continuing to provide hosting services for the Secretary's website. Jane, for her public astronomy work, and for showing me what amateur astronomy is all about.

Linda Mahan, thank you so much. Not only for your inexhaustible enthusiasm as an observer, and the artistry embodied in the beautiful awards you have created, but also for the splendid job you have done as Speaker Coordinator for the monthly general meetings. I'm looking forward to more great talks from the world-famous astronomers you have scheduled for 2005.

Lorrie Boen, I could always depend on you, no matter what. Every President should be blessed with a Treasurer as responsible as you. Though Lorrie will still remain a SFAA member, her volunteer efforts will continue outside the club. I wish you the very best.

No set of "thank-yous" would be complete without a galaxy-sized "thank-you" to Ken Frank. As a board member, he's helped out everywhere – from the Telescope Clinics, to maintaining the phone line, organizing Fremont Peak and Yosemite events, hosting the Annual Picnic at his home, and organizing group purchases of observer's guides and beginner's materials. He has done a great deal of sidewalk astronomy and helped John Dobson teach his Telescope Making class last fall. And did I mention he's Vice-President of the Astronomical Association of Northern California (AANC)? We gave Ken the Service Award last year for his outstanding service, but this year he's way outdone himself in his volunteer support for the club.

Finally, I want to thank John Dillon. He's been so helpful getting us moved into the Randall Museum, providing support for our meetings, co-sponsoring public astronomy events at the Randall, and as a speaker to the club. And now the future of the club is in his hands, as our new President. I am so pleased with John as our new leader and I have the best faith in his abilities and service to the club. John, take it away!

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## SFAA ELECTIONS RESULTS

Here are the results from the SFAA elections, conducted at the December General Meeting and by email proxy. The changeover to the new board will officially happen January 22, 2005 at the Annual Dinner. New officers and board members are requested to appear at the January Board meeting in the Randall Museum. Exact date for the board meeting has not yet been announced. (This must be decided amongst the members of the incoming Board).



President: John Dillon <[jdillon@randallmuseum.org](mailto:jdillon@randallmuseum.org)>  
Vice-President: Steve Bryson <[stevepur@mac.com](mailto:stevepur@mac.com)>  
Secretary: Jennifer Myers <[jenfrey@earthlink.net](mailto:jenfrey@earthlink.net)>  
Treasurer: Stefanie Ulrey <[SUlrey1680@aol.com](mailto:SUlrey1680@aol.com)>

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- 1) Russell H. Cashin <[rhplace@earthlink.net](mailto:rhplace@earthlink.net)>
- 2) Peter Schumacher <[drschu@itsa.ucsf.edu](mailto:drschu@itsa.ucsf.edu)>
- 3) Jorge Morales <[volare1@prodigy.net](mailto:volare1@prodigy.net)>
- 4) Kenneth Frank <[kennethfrank@planitarium.net](mailto:kennethfrank@planitarium.net)>
- 5) Robert English <[renglish@bogusnet.net](mailto:renglish@bogusnet.net)>
- 6) Nancy Cox
- 7) Michael Portuesi <[portuesi@jotabout.com](mailto:portuesi@jotabout.com)>

### ALTERNATE BOARD MEMBERS

- 1) Don Charles <[Don.Charles@sun.com](mailto:Don.Charles@sun.com)>
- 2) Dirk Lammerts <[dirk\\_lammerts@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dirk_lammerts@sbcglobal.net)>

Thanks to everyone who voted, and a big thanks for everyone who ran for leadership positions in SFAA.

**Michael Portuesi**  
Outgoing SFAA President

## IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES

<b>BOARD MEETING</b> <b>FEBRUARY 8</b> <b>MARCH 9</b> <b>7:00 P.M.</b> Western Addition Library Scott & Geary Streets, San Francisco	<b>SFAA GENERAL MEETING &amp; LECTURE</b> <b>JANUARY 22 – ANNUAL DINNER – 6:00</b> <b>BASQUE CULTURAL CENTER</b> <b>599 RAILROAD AVENUE, So. SAN FRANCISCO</b> <b>FEBRUARY 16</b> <b>MARCH 16</b> <b>7:00 P.M. DOORS OPEN</b> <b>7:30 P.M. ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> <b>8:00 P.M. SPEAKER</b> Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way (near 14 <sup>th</sup> Street and Roosevelt)
<b>CITY STAR PARTY</b> <b>JANUARY 15 – 5:00 P.M. - TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:00 P.M.</b> <b>FEBRUARY 19 – 5:30 P.M. - TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:30 P.M.</b> <b>MARCH 19 – 6:00 P.M., - TELESCOPE CLINIC 5:00 P.M.</b>	

Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2005, 7:00 p.m.

### Silicon Valley Astronomy Lecture Series

Smithwick Theater, Foothill College, El Monte Road and Freeway 280, Los Altos Hills, California  
Non-technical, illustrated talk

Astronomer Jeff Cuzzi, NASA's Ames Research Center

### "Exploring the Lord of the Rings: Cassini at Saturn"

Free and open to the public. Parking on campus costs \$2.

Call the series hot-line at 650-949-7888 for more information.

After a 7-year journey, the Cassini spacecraft arrived at Saturn in July 2004, to start a 4-year tour of the planet, its icy moons, and its vast ring system. In January, a probe from Cassini called Huygens will explore the haze-shrouded giant moon called Titan (the only moon in the solar system to have a thick atmosphere.)

Dr. Cuzzi, one of the world's experts on ring systems around planets, will describe the Cassini-Huygens spacecraft and the plans for this fascinating mission. He will highlight the most exciting results from the first few months of Saturn system exploration, with an emphasis on what we are learning about the complex structure and composition of Saturn's ring system and how such a dramatic set of rings may have originated.

Jeff Cuzzi is a research scientist in the Space Science Division at NASA's Ames Research Center and serves as the Interdisciplinary Scientist for Rings and Dust on the Cassini-Huygens. He was a "ringleader" in planning all the ring images taken at Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune by the Voyager spacecraft in the 1980s. Among his other research interests, he studies the formation of the first large objects during the birth of our solar system.

No background in science will be required for this talk, which will interest everyone who enjoys the latest news of exploration at the frontiers of astronomy.

Co-sponsored by

\* NASA Ames Research Center \* The Foothill College Astronomy Program  
The SETI Institute\* The Astronomical Society of the Pacific

## Planets Provide Holiday Lights Extravaganza at Dawn

by Robert C. Victor

*(Included in this issue for the benefit of January viewing)*

Early risers in this holiday season will be rewarded with views of all five naked-eye planets simultaneously. The unusual planetary quintet will lie on a long line across the sky, from Mercury and Venus low in the southeastern sky, to Saturn in the west.

Here are some tips for finding all the planets. The best viewing time will be about one hour before sunrise. The best mornings to see all the planets at once will be during the three weeks from December 19 through January 8.

Until December 28, the five naked-eye planets will line up from east to west in order of their actual distances from the Sun, that is, Mercury-Venus-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn. But don't expect to see the five planets tightly bunched! Their most compact arrangement will occur through December 22, when they will lie along a line stretching 135 degrees across the sky.

But the best view of five planets together occurs in the week after Christmas, when Mercury, the planet nearest to the Sun and usually lost in the solar glare, climbs highest in the dawn sky. A temporary alignment of Earth-Mercury-Venus in space causes Mercury to linger close to Venus that week and well into January, making Mercury unusually easy to find.

Venus, low in the southeast, and Jupiter, climbing high into the south, will be easy to recognize by their superior brilliance. Mars is faint and not far to the upper right of Venus. Saturn is well up in the west. From late December until mid-January, Mercury will appear to describe a tight loop around Venus, and the Moon will move through the 5-planet lineup December 28 through January 8. For illustrations depicting the changing appearance of the Moon and planets, see the Abrams Planetarium Sky Calendar, available at <http://www.pa.msu.edu/abrams/skycalendar>

Here's a day-by-day description of events. Angular measure in degrees is used to describe the apparent separation of objects in the sky. For example, high in the northern sky at dawn, the Pointer Stars in the bowl of the Big Dipper (the two stars which point to the North Star), are separated by just over 5 degrees. A typical pair of 7-power binoculars will usually fit both stars into the field of view simultaneously. Pollux and Castor, the two bright "Gemini Twins" stars near Saturn but not as bright, are 4.5 degrees apart. The Moon appears about half a degree across, although it may seem larger, because it is bright.

December 20: Mercury 6 degrees lower left of Venus low in SE. Binoculars help.

December 22: Mercury, brighter each morning, is now 4 degrees lower left of Venus.

December 25: Mercury 2 degrees left of Venus.

December 26: Mercury 1.7 degrees upper left of Venus. Mercury at its highest this week.

December 28: Mercury 1.3 degrees upper left of Venus. Saturn near Moon, well up in W.

December 28-January 8: The waning Moon fits within the span of five bright planets.

December 29-January 13: The order of the five planets from east to west is now Venus-Mercury-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn.

January 1 & 2: Mercury within 1.2 degrees above Venus.

January 3: Jupiter high in S, to lower left of half Moon.

January 4: Jupiter to upper right of fat crescent Moon; Spica close to Moon's lower right.

January 5: Five planets span 150 degrees. Mercury is 1.0 degree upper right of Venus, then remains less than 1 degree from Venus Jan. 6-17.

January 7: Mars and the star Antares, heart of the Scorpion, near crescent Moon in SE.

January 8: Mercury-Venus 0.8 degree apart, lower left of thin crescent Moon, very low SE.

January 12: Mercury 1/3 degree right of Venus. But they're lower each morning and will soon disappear into the solar glare.

January 13: Mercury 1/3 degree lower right of Venus.

January 14: Planets again appear in their actual order, Mercury-Venus-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn.

January 17: Mercury within 1 degree below Venus.

After this opportunity, the next easy chance to see a lineup of all five naked-eye planets across the sky will come at dawn in January-February 2016. The shortest span of that far-off gathering will be 112 degrees.



## SFAA 2005 CALENDAR

### JANUARY

- 15 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 15 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 22 SFAA ANNUAL DINNER 7 PM

### FEBRUARY

- 9 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM
- 19 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:30 PM
- 19 CITY STAR PARTY 5:30 PM

### MARCH

- 9 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM
- 19 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 5 PM
- 19 CITY STAR PARTY 6 PM
- 19 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY

### APRIL

- 13 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 16 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 16 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 20 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### MAY

- 11 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 14 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 14 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 18 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### JUNE

- 8 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 11 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 11 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 15 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### JULY

- 9 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 9 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 13 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 20 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### AUGUST

- 10 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 13 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 13 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 17 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### SEPTEMBER

- 14 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 10 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 10 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 21 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### OCTOBER

- 8 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 8 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 12 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 15 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 5:30 PM
- 15 CITY STAR PARTY 6:30 PM
- 19 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### NOVEMBER

- 9 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 12 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 12 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

### DECEMBER

- 10 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 10 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 14 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 21 GENERAL MEETING –  
ANNOUNCEMENTS 7:30 PM  
SPEAKER 8 PM

**CURRENTLY UNSCHEDULED: YOSEMITE TRIP, ANNUAL PICNIC**

Founded in September 1952, the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers (SFAA) is an association of people who share a common interest in astronomy and other related sciences. Our membership consists of people from all walks of life, educational backgrounds and ages. Many SFAA members own their own telescopes; some have been made by hand in local telescope-making classes and vary in size from 6 to 25 inches.

**Treasurer, SFAA, POB 15097, San Francisco CA 94115**

make checks payable to **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers** and mail to:

- \$10 enclosed, youth/student membership
- \$25 enclosed, individual membership
- \$30 enclosed, family or foreign membership
- \$40 enclosed, institutional membership
- \$75 enclosed, supporting membership

**Select one category:**

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Address:

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Name: Telephone:

## San Francisco Amateur Astronomers Membership Application

**San Francisco Amateur Astronomers**  
P.O. Box 15097  
San Francisco, CA 94115



Information Hotline: (415) 289-6636

Web Page: [www.sfaa-astronomy.org](http://www.sfaa-astronomy.org)

*Sharing the Wonders of the Universe*

**Has your membership expired?** Your mailing label includes the month and year through which your membership is paid. If it is past, your membership has expired and this may be your last issue.