



A hidden Mickey Mouse lives on Mercury. A NASA spacecraft has captured a spectacular photo of Mercury craters arranged in a shape that looks just like Disney's iconic cartoon mouse. The photo comes from NASA's **Messenger** spacecraft in orbit around Mercury and shows a giant crater topped with two smaller impact basins to create the recognizable shape.

SAVE THESE DATES!

April 3 **"Women in Astronomy"** by JoAnn Cogil 8:00 p.m. at Drake Observatory
 April 4, **Member Meeting** 6:30 p.m. followed by Sky Gazing at Ashton Observatory
 April 10 **"Comets: Mystery and Madness"** by Herb Folsom 8:00 p.m. at Drake Observatory
 April 11 8:00 p.m. **"Preview of the Coming 2026 Season"** by Derryl Barr and Greg Woolever at Ashton Observatory
 April 17 **"Cosmology: Everything There Is"** by Herb Folsom 8:00 p.m. Drake Observatory
 April 25 **"Astrophotography with DSLR"** by Heather Johnson – Ashton Observatory
 April 27 6:00 p.m. IPTV **"The Stars at Night"** A dark sky documentary
 April 29 8:00 p.m. IPTV **"Return to the Moon"** Follow the Artemis Mission
 May 15-17 North Central Region Astronomical League **conference** in Cedar Rapids
 October 8 -10 **Iowa Star Party**, Whiterock Conservancy

April 2026 Ashton Classroom Programs – 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 11 – *Preview of the coming 2026 Season* by Derryl Barr & Greg Woolever
 Saturday, April 25 – *Astrophotography with a DLSR/Mirrorless Camera* by Heather Johnson

April 2026 – President's Report

THANK YOU to those who came out to Ashton Observatory on Saturday March 14th to help with our annual spring cleaning in preparation for the opening of our 2026 Public Viewing Season on Saturday, April 4th. The gentlemen did a fantastic job in the classroom, lobby, east and west domes and the freestanding south dome. Everything looks so nice and clean. Hats off to Paul Caligiuri, Kent Hayek, Derrick Bennett, Kyle Wright, Bruce Mumm, Jim VandeBerg, Norm Van

Klompenburg and Greg Woolever. Yes, I helped too, but the guys outdid me!!

Everyone is excited about the new CDK 14-inch telescope we are purchasing as the replacement for the scope in the east dome. This is made possible by the generous donation from one of our DMAS



members who passed away a couple of years ago. Much appreciation to Greg Woolever, Norm Van Klompenburg and Dave Heck for their many, many hours of research and discussion with company representatives to determine what our needs are and what equipment beyond the telescope that needs to be purchased.

Payment options to DMAS have been a work in progress since Cash App stopped working. Bruce, our DMAS Treasurer, delved into this and we are now able to accept payments from both Venmo and PayPal. These can be used for membership fees, private group program fees or donations to DMAS.

Club members voted to close Ashton Observatory on the weekend of May 16 to allow members to attend the upcoming regional conference that weekend in Cedar Rapids, IA. This is a wonderful opportunity to join other astronomers from our NCRAL region with the conference being held in Iowa this year. I look forward to seeing many of you there!

One of the top 2026 priorities was lighting along the new sidewalk. Our first attempt was to place a few solar lights that shine in red light and are easily inserted into the dirt

next to the sidewalk. We had these placed the night of our Annual Chili Supper on Saturday March 7th and the lights provided small areas of light onto the sidewalk. The downside to using these solar lights is someone must place them along the sidewalk each time we have an event at the observatory and to be sure the solar cells are charged. Then the lights must be removed and stored inside the building at the end of each event.

Another suggestion was to paint fluorescent paint along the edges of the sidewalk. Stay tuned for more information as we continue to contemplate the lighting situation.

Hope to see everyone at our April Membership Meeting on Saturday, April 4th.

- JoAnn Cogil



The Des Moines Astronomical Society

Monthly Members' Meeting

April 4th, at 6:30 P.M.

at Ashton Observatory

- Call to Order – Introductions
- Secretary's Report – March meeting minutes (printed in April Starlight Journal)
- Treasurer's Report
- Observatory Director's Report
- Timberline Report
- Committee Report
- Member Comments
- Other Business
- Drake Observatory Spring Lecture Series // lectures begin at 8:00 P.M. CDT
 - April 10th – Comets: Mystery & Madness
 - April 17th – Cosmology: Everything There Is
 - April 24th – Open Topic
 - May 1st – Cosmology Part 2: More Everything
- Dean Regas – Zoom presentations // zooms scheduled to begin at 6:00 P.M. CDT
 - April 7th – Top 10 Things to See in the Night Sky
 - May 5th – It's About Time – How We Use the Sky
- NCRAL 2026 Conference
 - May 15-17
 - in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 - *Ashton Observatory will be closed this weekend as approved by membership*
- First Saturday of our 2026 Public Viewing Season is TONIGHT!!
- Next Membership Meeting Date: May 2nd at Ashton Observatory
 - Time is 6:30 PM
- Adjourn

The Des Moines Astronomical Society
Board of Directors Meeting Agenda
April 4, 2026, at 5:30 P.M.
at Ashton Observatory

- Call to order
- Secretary's Report – February 2026 Meeting Minutes (published in March 2026 Starlight Journal)
- Treasurer's Report
- Observatory Director's Report
- Timberline Update
- Other Business
- Adjourn



Observatory Committee Report

April 2026, Greg Woolever, Observatory Director

And a new season zooms in upon us! We're excited about the coming opportunities for night sky views and how to welcome visitors to the night sky.

Thanks to all who helped with spring cleaning on March 14. We had a great crew and good weather, so work was completed by noon as hoped. See the photo below.

For those who didn't know, long-time DMAS member JR Paulson has orchestrated an upgrade in our classroom to install museum-quality track lights to better illuminate the images on the walls there. JR purchased all the components and paid for the installation – another major improvement to our Observatory. Wait until you see it, and thank JR.

The order for the PlaneWave CDK14 telescope has been placed. Arrival is predicted to be late April. This will replace the existing Meade SCT14 in the east dome.

The Observatory Committee will install it as soon as possible once it arrives. The optics of this telescope are magnificent, so be sure to check it out once we are operational.

Check the season schedule available on our website for the classroom program offerings — 2nd and 4th Saturdays each month. See you there.

Greg Woolever & the Observatory Committee:
Dave Heck, Norm Van Klompenburg,
Jim VandeBerg, JoAnn Cogill, Greg Woolever.



Spring cleaning volunteers (L-R): Kyle Wright, Kent Hayek, Paul Caligiuri, JoAnn Cogil, Derrick Bennett; Bruce Mumm, Jim VandeBerg, Norm Van Klompenburg. Taking the photo: Greg Woolever.

New Telescope Ordered for the East Dome!



Observatory Director, Greg Woolever, providing a preview of our new scope after the chili supper.

On March 7, the membership voted to purchase a new telescope for the east dome. The new telescope is a professional, research grade PlaneWave CDK 14" Special thanks was given by the membership to Norm Van Klompenburg, Greg Woolever and Dave Heck for their great many hours of research on this important project.

The Night Sky for April 2026

By JoAnn Cogil

Neil Armstrong, Astronaut (1930-2012): "I remember on the trip home on Apollo 11, it suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small." (Quote taken from www.spacecenter.org, the Space Center Houston website)

Mercury - rises before the Sun but will be difficult to see due to the lightening of the morning skies. On the 3rd, it has its greatest western elongation.

Venus – mid-month we find our evening star near the Pleiades. On the 23rd, Uranus joins Venus & the Pleiades.
Evening of April 23rd. Image credit: Stellarium





Earth – ‘Earth Day’ is April 22nd. The name Earth is about 1,000 years old. All the planets, except for Earth, were named after Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. However, the name Earth is a Germanic word, which simply means “the ground.”

Mars – another planet rising shortly before the Sun this month. On the 15th, the red planet rises with Mercury, Saturn & Neptune but all may be difficult to see.

Jupiter – will be in our western sky after sunset and visible all evening, making it a good telescope target. On the 1st, the 4 Galilean moons will all be on one side of the planet and in order of their distance from Jupiter.

Saturn – another planet rising shortly before the Sun, but tough to see early in the month. By month’s end, it rises sooner in the dawn twilight hours and provides us with a small window of viewing.

Uranus – stays near the Pleiades this month.



Neptune – will be near Saturn in the early morning hours before sunrise.

Moon

1st – FULL moon at 9:11 P.M. CDT

9th – 3rd quarter

17th – NEW moon at 6:51 A.M. CDT

23rd – first quarter

This month’s full moon is the “Pink Moon” as it heralds the appearance of the ‘moss pink’ or Phlox flower plant, one of the first spring wildflowers. It is also called the Grass Moon (time to get our lawn mowers ready) and the Egg Moon for the arrival of spring and birds beginning to lay their eggs.

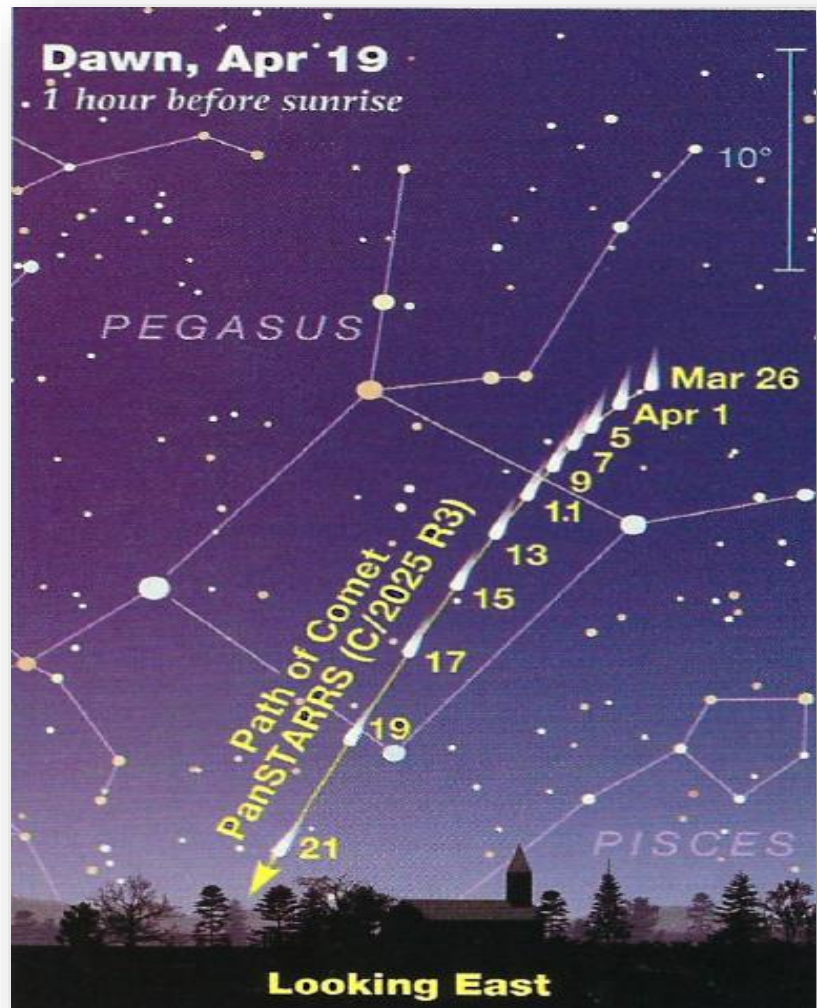
On the 2nd, the Moon rises with the bright star Spica in the east-southeast. On the 22nd, the Moon and Jupiter are

together in Gemini the Twins constellation in the evening hours. On the 25th, our Moon occults the star Regulus in the early evening.

Comet Watch

Comet c/2025 R3 (PanSTARRS) – reaches perihelion on April 20th when it makes its closest pass to the Sun, which could make it easy to see with binoculars, or possibly with our naked eyes. On April 27th it passes close to Earth at a distance of 44 million miles and should be very bright. Look at the eastern sky about 90 minutes before sunrise as it travels through the Great square of Pegasus.

(Image credit: Sky&Telescope)



Meteor Shower

Lyrids – arrive this month as they run from April 15-29 and peaks on the night of the 21st-22nd. This shower can produce 15-20 meteors per hour and usually has swift, bright meteors, like “fireballs”. It comes from the Comet Thatcher (C/1861 G1) which has an orbital period of 415 years.

The comet is currently travelling outward from our solar system and expected to reach its farthest point from our Sun about the year 2070. It then begins its return trip to our solar system and should be here about 2283. We should have favorable viewing this year due to the waxing crescent moon providing darker skies.

Educational Opportunities

Dean Regas is **an astronomer, public speaker, author, and podcaster** who brings the complicated universe down to Earth for audiences of all ages.

Dean is an honorary member of the Des Moines Astronomical Society.

He is also the host of the “Looking UP” podcast.

Visit Dean at his astronomy website: <https://astrodean.com/>



Free Online Zoom Classes in 2026 with Astronomer Dean Regas

Feb 11: Life and Times of Galileo

Mar 11: Comets and Meteors

Apr 7: Top 10 Things to See in the Night Sky

May 5: It's About Time - How We Use the Sky

June 2: Webb and Rubin Telescope Updates

July 7: Along the Milky Way

Aug: TBD (depending on the itinerary of my eclipse trip)

Sep 1: Ancient Greek Astronomy

Oct 6: Monsters in the Sky - Constellations of Fall

Nov 3: Life and Death of Stars

Dec 1: Exoplanets News

DMAS members will receive an email with free links to all of these programs!

Astronomical League

Explore these Rewarding and Educational Observing Programs

The **Astronomical League** is an umbrella organization of amateur astronomy societies. Currently their membership consists of over 330 organizations across the United States, including the **Des Moines Astronomical Society**. You can find many useful astronomy resources on their website.



Please give a warm welcome to these new DMAS members:

Ben Sinclair

James Rankin

Julie Walker

James Bruton

Sally Cone

William Cone

Annual Chili Supper! Lots of Food, Friendship and Fun!







Business Meeting after the Chili Dinner

No Bob, I said Crayford focuser,
not crayfish focuser.



This Month in DMAS History

From the StarLight Journal 25 Years Ago, March 2001

There are no StarLight Journals in the online archives for January through June of 2001.

From the StarLight Journal 10 Years Ago, April 2016

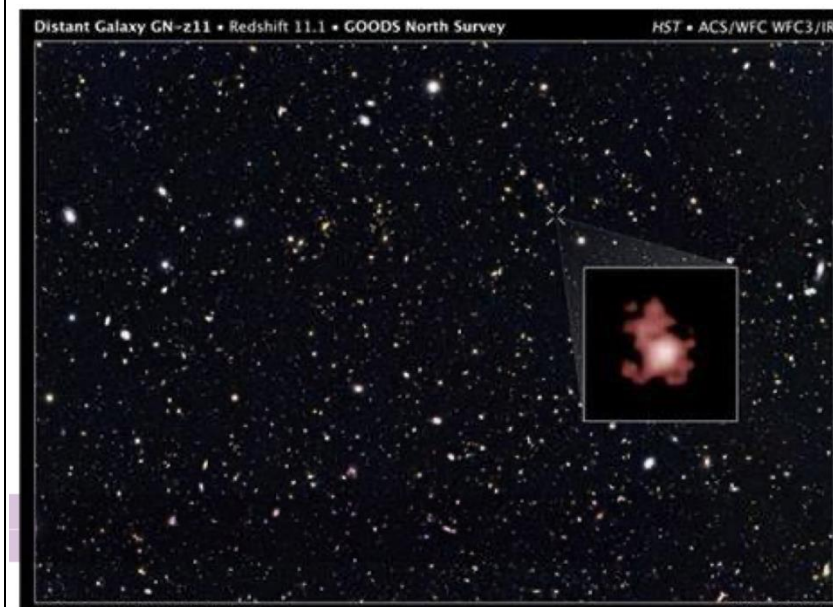
Hubble Team Breaks Cosmic Distance Record

DMAS member Bob Brammer announced that March 3 was big day for his son, Gabe, and colleagues. The story was released today by Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, where Gabe works, and the story is showing up around the world.

Gabe Brammer is co-author on a team that used the Hubble Space Telescope to discover this FAR away, early galaxy. Gabe works at SPACE TELESCOPE SCIENCE INSTITUTE, Baltimore, MD.

The newly discovered early galaxy is the farthest-away object ever seen from Earth, so far. The Big Bang is reckoned to have occurred 13.8 billion years ago; this galaxy is seen here now as it formed just 400 million years after the Big Bang -- with new stars rapidly popping into existence in the young galaxy. The image below taken with the Hubble Space Telescope is provided by the Space Telescope Science Institute.

The galaxy has the memorable name GN-z11. What does that mean? Wikipedia to the rescue. "The object's name is derived from its location in the GOODS-North field of galaxies and its high Doppler z-scale redshift number 11. While GN-z11 is observed as it existed 13.4 billion years ago, it is currently much farther away than 13.4 billion light-years due to the expansion of space.



Other Astronomy Events that Happened in April

1006 April 30 Supernova SN1006 is first seen. It's the brightest observed celestial event in human history

1781 April 26 – William Herschel announces the discovery of a comet, but it is actually Uranus

1961 April 12 – Soviet Union's Yuri Gagarin is the first man in space

1967 April – NASA's Surveyor 3 probe lands on the moon and sends back the first televised pictures

1973 April 5 – Pioneer 11 successfully reaches Saturn

1990 – April 25 – Hubble Space Telescope is launched

1995 April 1 – "Pillars of Creation" photo taken by Hubble

2014 April 3 – Astronomers announce that Enceladus likely has liquid ocean under the icy crust

2019 April 10 Event Horizon Project releases first image of the black hole in M87

2020 April 27 Asteroid 2020-HS7 with a rotational period of just 3 seconds is discovered



Early this cold Monday (3/16/26) morning, around 8:00 am, I noticed some sundogs out my front window. I decided that I should go take some photos of the sundogs. It was quite cold too, around 7 degrees and windy. I drove up past the Merle Hay shopping mall to get a clear view of the sundogs. These photos were taken with my Canon DSLR camera and my 18-200 mm lens.

L. Allen Beers

YouTube presentation on Venus by DMAS Member JR Paulson

Greetings sky watchers!

It is continuing to be horrible in Iowa for imaging, the 4th month in a row!

So instead of images this month, I'm attaching a link to a recent Bucket Class I just gave on *Venus* that is available on You tube. It is a 90-minute presentation covering many aspects of the planet.

If you want to learn more about this planet, check it out and let me know what you think.....good or bad.

For over a dozen years a group in the community have organized and recorded various topics of *"Everything you want to learn before you kick the bucket."* They recruit people from Grinnell College and others, like me, from the community to present these on Wednesday mornings. Previous ones are kept in an archive on You tube.

I've given ones on topics from *Aliens* to *Zombies*, as well as some on astronomy and medicine.

If you find Venus worthwhile, and I can't image for the rest of the month, I'll send you another astronomy link one next month.

https://youtu.be/ws-w48_xtbg

Happy equinox!

Skydoc – JR Paulson

Flight to the Moon (April Fool's Day - 1941)

New York City's [Hayden Planetarium](#) advertised that at 2 o'clock on April 1st the "first non-stop rocket ship flight to the moon" would take place, leaving from the planetarium with Professor William H. Barton Jr. at the controls. The announcement was accompanied by an illustration by artist Tom Voter.

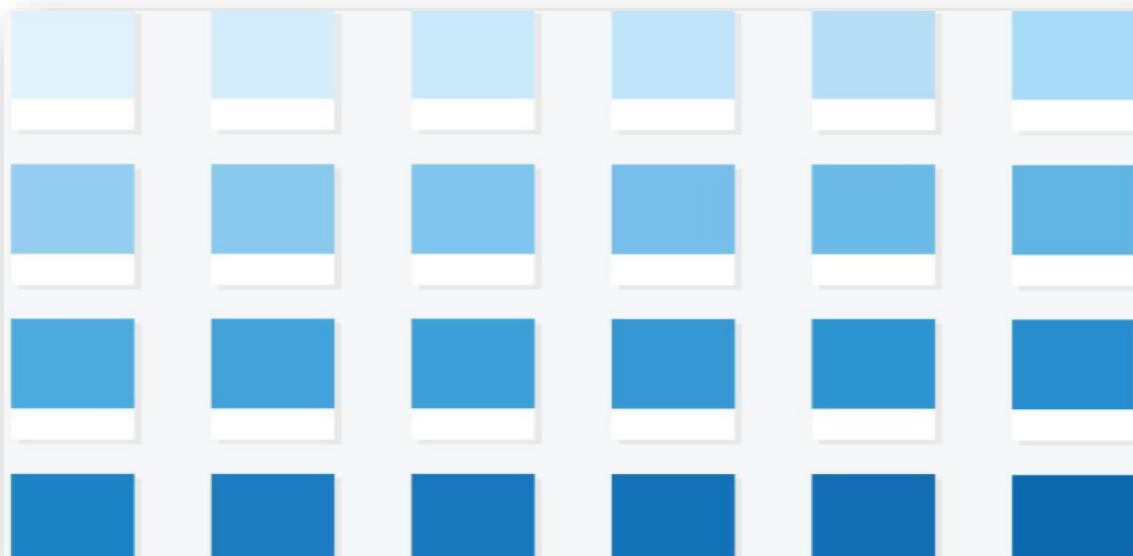
Before the actual "flight," Barton offered a clarification to the New York Times: "The only April Fool element in this miracle flight is that the 240,000 miles of space between the earth and the moon will be spanned in the comfort of the

imagination, aided by trick photography, weird lighting effects and a realistic reproduction of the fantastic lunar landscapes."



Citizen Science Project!

Use Sky-O-Meter to Grade the Sky Color on Citizen “Mass Observation Day”



Sky-O-Meter Chart

The British *“Mail on Sunday”* announced that the sky is becoming less blue. It cited a five-year study conducted at the Koenraad University in Amsterdam which had used special digital cameras and color charts to measure subtle shifts in the sky's color. The study's researchers had found that the "'coefficient of blueness'... has drastically diminished in five years from 9.3 per cent in 1996 to just 6.9 per cent this year." They attributed this color change to the effects of air pollution and the depleting ozone layer.

The *Mail on Sunday* is inviting citizens to help the researchers in Amsterdam by taking part in a "mass observation" scheduled to occur between 10am and noon on April 1. By holding the Sky-O-Meter chart up to the sky, readers can determine which shade best matches the color of the sky. Please send your results to the *Mail on Sunday*, which will forward them to the Amsterdam researchers. Send your results to skyometer.aprilfool@gmail.com

Dear Observatory Family,
Tell your friends and family, and as
usual it is free and open to all. Of
course, we will warn you if the road
is impassable.

All the best,
Herb Folsom

DRAKE MUNICIPAL
OBSERVATORY PUBLIC
NIGHTS 2026 Lectures start
at 8:00 p.m.



April 3rd	Women in Astronomy: JoAnn Cogil (DMAS)
April 10th	Comets: Mystery and Madness
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May 8th	Mars Exploration: Landers, Rovers & Helicopters
May 15th	Telescopes: Infinite Knowledge Through Infinite Diversity



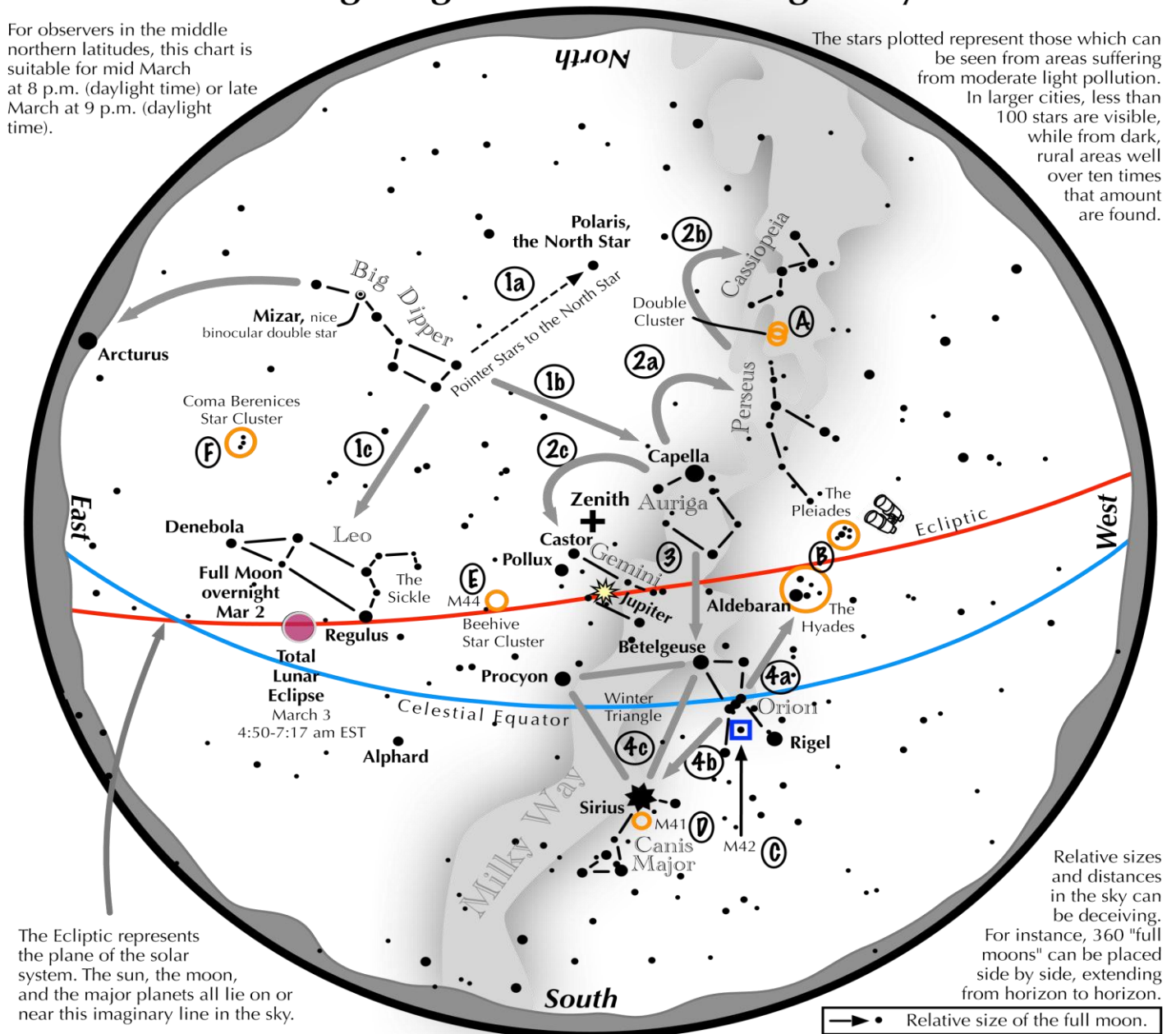
Beautiful Early Morning Photo by Observatory Director Greg Woolever

Ashton Observatory, Thursday March 19 as the sun rose at 7:30 a.m. Greg Woolever was meeting with the electricians to install museum quality track lighting in the classroom courtesy of a donation by DMAS member JR Paulson. You can see the top of the trees on the right have sunlight illuminating them.

Navigating the mid March Night Sky

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid March at 8 p.m. (daylight time) or late March at 9 p.m. (daylight time).

The stars plotted represent those which can be seen from areas suffering from moderate light pollution. In larger cities, less than 100 stars are visible, while from dark, rural areas well over ten times that amount are found.



The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons" can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

→ • Relative size of the full moon.

Navigating the March night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

- 1 Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star. Its top bowl stars point west to Capella in Auriga, nearly overhead. Leo reclines below the Dipper's bowl.
- 2 From Capella jump northwestward along the Milky Way to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
- 3 Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt Stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star Rigel.
- 4 Use Orion's three Belt stars to point northwest to the red star Aldebaran and the Hyades star cluster, then to the Pleiades star cluster. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius. It is a member of the Winter Triangle.

Binocular Highlights

A: Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster. **B:** Examine the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades, two naked eye star clusters. **C:** M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. **D:** Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. **E:** M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux. **F:** Look high in the east for the loose star cluster of Coma Berenices.



Astronomical League www.astroleague.org; duplication is allowed and encouraged for all free distribution.



Our 2026 Des Moines Astronomical Society Officers, Directors & Observatory Committee

President: JoAnn Cogil

Vice-President: Pat Meade

Secretary/ALCor: Jim VandeBerg

Treasurer: Bruce Mumm

Observatory Director: Greg Woolever

At Large Director: Norm Van Klompenburg

At Large Director: Jessica Weinreich

At Large Director: Dave Bailey

Observatory Committee: Greg Woolever, Norm Van Klompenburg, Dave Heck, and Jim VandeBerg

Contact us at:
info@DMastronomy.com

The *Starlight Journal* is the monthly newsletter of the **Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc.** P.O. Box 111, Des Moines Iowa 50301-0111. Our Observatory is located in Ashton Wildwood Park, 8755 West 122nd Street North. Founded in 1970, we are a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization. Our website is DMastronomy.com. More information and photos can be found on our Facebook page.

Article Deadline: Before the 21st of the month, please send your articles, photos, sketches, poems, cartoons, and news to Jim VandeBerg (FinePineCabin@gmail.com) Articles may be edited to fit the allotted newsletter space. Copyrighted material must have permission from the copyright holder. Views and opinions expressed within submissions are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc.

The Purpose of our Society

- Secure the pleasure and benefits of an association of persons interested in amateur astronomy
- Promote the science of astronomy
- Encourage and promote activities of an astronomical nature
- Foster observational, computational, technical, and creative skills in various fields of astronomy
- Pursue activities with other amateurs and professionals
- Educate the public

Des Moines Astronomical Society
PO BOX 111
Des Moines, Iowa 50301

