

Ashton Observatory Public Nights

The Des Moines Astronomical Society invites you to visit the Ashton Observatory Saturdays, 8:00 p.m., April through October.

Most Saturdays include a classroom presentation, followed by stargazing as sky conditions allow.

Meet one of our presenters this season:

Jim Stearns



Jim Stearns has always had a curiosity regarding how things work. Every toy in his childhood was taken apart in the hopes of improving them. A few actually attained that status. Using a tool was helpful, but it was often more fun to discover how they were made and why they worked. He and his older brother started a mower repair business in Junior High School. This evolved into mostly a mowing business, which paid for most of his college.

Jim received a BA from Iowa State University in 1974 and began a career at a large corporation. Cameras and photography were always an interest, but during those years the film processing was expensive and placed a damper on the interest. It did not take long for Jim to realize that deskwork did not fit him very well. He knew he had a good mechanical aptitude as well as an understanding of electrical theory, and physics and began looking for an industry what utilized these things.

The HVAC industry required all these things and in 1977 this became his new career home. For the last 15 years Jim has worked for the Waldinger Corporation designing and installing building control systems in the service department. Having been in the industry for almost 40 years, he has seen the evolution of equipment and controls evolve from electromechanical to electronic. The most satisfying challenges have been in retrofitting older systems. Merging the reliability and quality of the old equipment with solid-state precision controls is very satisfying. Building owners keep the best of what they have and gain the best of what is now available. In his words, "It's a fun job ... but somebody has to do it."

Jim's interest in astronomy began in 2012 on a vacation in Estes Park, Colorado. He and one of his sons discovered the Estes Park Memorial Observatory there and it was having a public night that evening. They viewed the heavens through a 12" Meade telescope. As soon as he got home he discovered DMAS and has been attending as often as he can. He sees elegance and beauty in the dynamics of the universe.