

## 2017 Orange Blossom Special Review

KELLY ANDERSON

This year's edition of our Wintery Star Festival was a mixed bag of viewing opportunities, a bit chilly at times, but filled with events to amaze and delight the senses. We had 101 astronomers, plus spouses and kiddies, join us for a great week.

Some of us were thinking of arriving on the previous Sunday to give us ample time to set up and prepare. A close look at the weather report disabused us of any inclination to do that. With wind gusts more than 50 miles per hour, heavy rain and scary lightning we stayed home. A little discretion goes a long way.

Monday was clearing, but still windy. Nothing near 50 mph, but still a tad much to put up the Hospitality and Reception tents. We did get some things done that weren't dependent on calmer climes. Your Stalwart Reporter managed to set up his observatory tent without providing too much entertainment for observers, but extra guy ropes were needed to keep the structure from blowing into the depths of the Green Swamp. The winds calmed and the skies cleared at sunset, providing a very good night for astronomy.

Scattered clouds returned Tuesday morning, along with fresh breezes, but not nearly as gusty as Monday. The club tents went up without undue tribulation, and the tent contractor had no difficulty erecting the Lecture and Mirror Lab/Theater shelters. Those ever-important Port-o-Lets arrived and were placed into immediate service. We were becoming a village with all the necessities of civilized life. The "Kickin Caribbean" food wagon arrived and set up shop. Seeing was even better Tuesday night. A larger-than-usual number of attendees had arrived early, so the viewing crowd was much bigger than the previous night.



Our Viewing Field

Wednesday, the official opening of OBS 2017! Kyle Brinkman conducted an imaging presentation on "Target Selection, Frame, and Focus" for the Image Academy. The club hosted a social hour later that afternoon with a dazzling display of delectable comestibles. Seeing started out as good-to-excellent, but precisely at 10:00 o'clock the astronomy was abruptly halted with a sudden appearance of a total overcast. It seemed to come out of nowhere! We knew another front was coming and hoped it would pass quickly bringing clear skies behind. Yeah, we really thought that might happen.

Thursday activities began with a Bicycle Trail Ride, led by your Stalwart Reporter. The weather was perfect, clear and cool with no wind. Half of us went up the hill to the Tower then around the Park, while the other half went out of the Park and across the one-lane bridge over the Withlacoochee to the Green Swamp. Wonderful riding trails over there.

The Image Academy that afternoon was led by Bob Stelmock, who showed us how to do "Easy Peasy Video Photography." Chap Percival, noted author of *Go See the Eclipse and Bring a Kid With You* gave us a scintillating talk about ... you guessed it ... seeing the eclipse scheduled to appear next August. After a social hour and dinner, we were treated to a magnificent view of ... more clouds!

Friday Kyle Brinkman led the Telescope Walkabout where we had the opportunity to see a variety of telescopes and chat about them with their operators. There was a lot of interest, and the



Our future astronomer.

walkabout went over the allotted hour. This necessitated some to leave early to join the Ladies Luncheon in downtown Dade City.



President Kyle Brinkman surveys his domain.

The Ladies Luncheon is always a big hit. They reported having a great time of food and fellowship. Several of the ladies elected to stay in Dade City for shopping and a preview of the annual Dade City Cumquat Festival. No, really. There is such a thing, and it's a big deal to the Dade City folks.

Antonio Paris, our professional astronomer *par excellence* gave an interesting presentation on the "Wow Signal." His working hypothesis is that the signal from the general direction of Sagittarius in the '70s that caused such a stir may actually have come from a comet. There were two comets, unknown to science at the time, that are now known to have been in the same general direction as the Wow, and perhaps one of them was the real source of the signal, rather than a product of an extraterrestrial intelligence as had been widely speculated. His radio telescope equipment has been thoroughly tested and is ready to go. In February, he'll be able to see if his hypothesis is correct. Pins and needles, Antonio. Pins and needles.

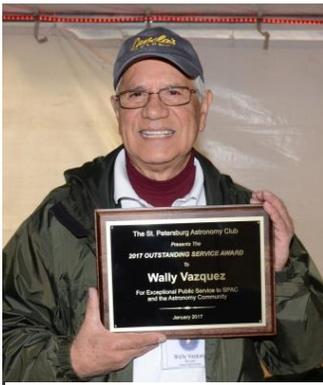
Antonio was followed by John O'Neill who presented Part Three of the Image Academy. He talked about enhancing images with Adobe PhotoShop®. He was followed by the evening social hour. After dinner, we, star gazers, were able to gaze fondly at... more clouds! Shucks, darn, gee whiz, golly! Maybe Saturday night?

Saturday began with a nature walk with Mike Davis, who led our intrepid walkers through the wilds and woods of the Park. Always a fun and educational event. They returned in time for

the annual Swap Table, where astronomy junk was turned into astronomy treasures. After lunch, the Hee-Haw Hayride departed for a trip across the Withlacoochee River and along the Green Swamp.



**Our attendees gather just before the Wrap-Up**



**Wally Vazques received our 2016 Outstanding Service Award.**

The traditional Closing Program began at 2:00 o'clock with the traditional group photo, followed by the traditional door prizes. The winner of the Dobson Award was not in attendance and will be announced at a later date. There was a special "Outstanding Service Award" presented to Wally Vazquez for superlative contributions to the club during the past year. *Congrats, Wally!*

In a break from tradition, there were three awards, rather than the traditional two, presented for the astrophotography contest this year. In addition to the "Best Deep Field" and "Best Wide Field," an "Honorable Mention" for either category was added. Kyle Brinkman won the latter for his image of Bernard 33 (the Horsehead Nebula), while both the

Deep Field and Wide Field awards were won by ... well ... your Stalwart Reporter! Talk about a shock! My Deep Field image was of Messier 42 and Sharpless 279, (the Orion and Running Man Nebulae). The Wide Field image is of NGC 2024 and Bernard 33 (the Flame and Horsehead Nebulae), with the star Alnitak at center frame. Here are the submissions:



**Kelly Anderson receives both the Wide Field and Deep Field Astrophotography Awards.**



Kelly Anderson's Award Winning Deep Field Image  
The Great Orion & Running Man Nebulae



Kelly's Award Winning Wide Field Image  
The Flame & Horsehead Nebulae



Kyle Brinkman's Honorable Mention  
Horsehead Nebula

Unfortunately, the weather forced the cancellation of the Saturday Night Hayride, and because the chance of any observing was slim to none, several of our members decided to head home Saturday evening. A larger contingent decided to stay one more night and enjoy the social activities in dry areas. We were visited with episodic rain showers, and the temperature wasn't particularly conducive to shorts and t-shirts, so that chased everyone indoors, but hey! We only do this once a year. Why let a little weather keep us down?

Mark your calendars. The 2018 OBS is scheduled for February 7<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>.