



ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE

**A FEDERATION OF ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETIES
A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION**

- ★ *To promote the science of astronomy;*
- ★ *By fostering astronomical education;*
- ★ *By providing incentives for astronomical observation and research;*
- ★ *By assisting communication among amateur astronomical societies.*

ASTRO NOTES

Produced by the Astronomical League

Note 21: Organizing an Astronomy Club

You and several others with an interest in astronomy have decided to form an astronomy club. How do you proceed? This brief note provides an outline. Also see Astro Note 6, Club Constitution and Bylaws, for suggestions on writing the formal, guiding documents of your new club.

Publicity

Your first task is to let the community know that you are forming an astronomy club. There are probably many others in your area who share your interest and would like to join -- and would be willing to help! Besides the obvious notice in the local paper (try to get it run 3 or 4 times over two weeks), contact science teachers and principals of local schools. They may have an interest or have students that might be interested in astronomy. Often, teachers are looking for opportunities to enrich their students' activities beyond the textbook and can be enthusiastic supporters of a new club. Local radio and TV weather people can also be a help in "getting the word out." A park district may let you hold a star party to attract prospective members, and they can help publicize the event, too.

Try to design an attractive poster that announces the first meeting. Make it attractive and keep it to 8x10 inches or so in size. Local libraries, including those in schools, will usually cooperate and let you post an organization announcement on a community information bulletin board. Merchants, especially those dealing in science related products, may also let you place a poster in a store window or on a counter. Be sure to get the announcements out with plenty of lead time before the first meeting.

After you have organized, continue to publicize your activities. You will always get new members, even after years of operation, who will have heard of the club only recently. Register your organization and a point of contact with your local library and chamber of commerce so that casual inquiries will be passed along.

Meetings

Most clubs try to meet on a monthly basis. It is most convenient to meet at a fixed time and place each month for business and general information exchange and have observing "star parties" on floating dates depending on lunar phase and weather. You can more easily schedule a meeting room for fixed dates, also.

Meeting rooms can be found at schools, colleges, libraries, churches or, if you have one available, a planetarium or observatory. It is important that the meeting time and place be fixed so that members get in the habit of reserving, say, the first Wednesday of each month for the club meeting. Regular meeting dates help keep attendance high.

At first, each member will have a unique perspective to share and meeting programs may be informal discussions with one member acting as discussion leader on a rotating basis. Later on you may want a more formal program. Local experts in the area are usually willing to talk on their favorite subject. Look, again, to teachers, college professors or even other clubs that are nearby. The Astronomical League has a Program Materials Committee whose sole function is to provide video tapes and other materials for use by member societies of the League. Local libraries may also have astronomy-related films and tapes available. In general, try to keep the business short and the programs interesting to keep the members coming. Ask them what they want to see/do for meetings. Every club is different and has its own personality.

Activities

What will you do besides have meetings? Star parties are one activity. No matter how large or small the local community, there is always a darker sky just a few miles away! Star parties are usually held at a site which provides members and guests with an opportunity to observe things they can not see at home. It is fun to look at M42 through a variety of telescopes and compare the views. It might help someone decide which telescope to buy. Use some of the star parties to attract new members: set up in a public park, even if it is not as dark as desired -- it will be convenient for the general public and more likely to draw them in. **PUBLICIZE** the event. If they know of it, they will come (to paraphrase a movie phrase).

A periodic newsletter sounds like a lot of work -- and it can be. But you need some kind of communication announcing meetings and other activities. Inexpensive computer programs are now available to "dress up" even a brief letter into newsletter format. A simple, neat appearing newsletter can be sent to the same locations which originally publicized your formation. If it looks nice, merchants are more apt to display it in a public information area. You can exchange newsletters with other clubs to find out what they are doing, thereby getting ideas for other activities for your own club. See the May issue of *Astronomy* or the September issue of *Sky and Telescope* for a list of other clubs around the country. You may want to start small with the exchange, maybe just other clubs in your state, or postage will rapidly get out of hand. Be sure to send a copy to the Community Editor of your local newspaper.

Always take advantage of opportunities to present astronomy to the general public. **Astronomy Day** is an annual event each spring when clubs around the country set up displays in malls, parks or other public areas. But you need not wait for Astronomy Day. Plan a booth at the state or county fair; at the local July 4th celebration; at any local event. Show people that astronomy is **fun**, not just some theoretical science that has no relevance to daily life. Besides getting new members, you may be asked to make future presentations at 4H, scouting groups, or civic groups. There is still an Astronomy merit badge in Boy Scouts. Contact the local council and offer club's services as merit badge counselor.

Dues

Many of these activities cost money. You will have to charge members dues to cover the cost of operating the club. Be realistic in your projected needs. Typical dues range from \$20 to \$60 annually per member. The more expensive dues may include a subscription to either *Astronomy* or *Sky and Telescope* at the group rate each magazine offers to clubs.

After you have formed your club, you might consider membership in the Astronomical League. We have many services to offer both your club and your individual members. For further information on joining the League, contact the National Office at 9201 Ward Parkway Suite 100, Kansas City, MO 64114 or leagueoffice@astroleague.org .