

Winter/Spring 2025

History of the River Bend Astronomy Club: Part 1-Early Days

By Gary Kronk



Whether helping a child observe our nearest star at Astronomy Day, researching the history of comet observation or leading the members of River Bend Astronomy Club, Gary Kronk enjoys astronomy on many levels. PHOTO BY ERIC YOUNG

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The beginnings of the River Bend Astronomy Club actually occurred in Belleville, Illinois. Kurt Sleeter started taking classes at Belleville Area College (now Southwestern Illinois College) in 1989, after deciding to switch careers. Having gotten the astronomy bug about a decade earlier observing through the telescopes of Gary Kronk, Kurt asked professors about the observatory on campus. He was ultimately directed to professor Frank Cange, a physics and chemistry teacher at the college. They

met and when the meeting was over, BAC was going to start an astronomy club and Kurt would be its first president. Kurt called Gary that evening and asked if he would help. Ads were put in the Belleville News-Democrat and the club began growing. There were few students, but it attracted several men and women from the Belleville area.

Gary was working at Washington University at the time and met Eric Young in the Fall of 1991. Eric had just been hired in the Public Affairs department and Gary set up his computer. A poster that Eric had hung up next to his desk had an astronomy theme, which got them talking. Gary invited Eric to attend an upcoming public outreach event at BAC's observatory. Despite clouds, Eric showed up, as well as a dozen other people. The only thing they could see was Jupiter, but the night proved a success. A few more people joined. The club really took off during 1992 and membership continued to grow to about 25-30 people. The club began doing public outreach at local schools and for scouting events. BAC was getting a lot of publicity because of the club and in 1994 they presented the club with \$15,000 to fix up the observatory telescope and to buy new portable telescopes for students and public outreach events.

Since Kurt was working full time at his HVAC job, he was only taking one class

each semester. He finally graduated with his associates degree in computer science in 1995. Within a few days, Kurt found out that since he was no longer a student he could no longer be president of the club. Although a new student was appointed president, she was not as knowledgeable about astronomy as Kurt and the club membership quickly dwindled. Although the club is still active today, over 30 years later, it is purely a student organization and seems to do no outreach with its small membership.

By this time, Gary had moved to the Washington University School of Medicine and became friends with Ed Cunnius. Shortly thereafter, Kurt landed a job at the medical school as well. Gary and Eric were already meeting for lunch every Friday and they soon invited Kurt and Ed to join them. It was during those lunches that the four became good friends and began observing together at Gary's house just outside of Troy, Illinois. They also began doing public outreach in the Troy, Collinsville, Edwardsville, and St. Louis area. Anywhere from one to three of these guys gave eight talks to various girl scout troops during the remainder of 1995 and the number of talks increased in the years that followed. It did not take long for discussions about forming a new astronomy club began, as they wanted to find more people who were interested in observing and doing outreach. (Part 2 next issue.)

The River's Edge Sky Puppies Program:



Vincent displays his Sky Puppy Robotic Mission Project. (Photo by Jeff Menz)

Our current student has completed his project and just needs a few observations. We will then complete his documentation and apply for his certificate. Weather, cloudy skies, and even smoke from Canadian fires are not helping! We are looking forward to getting him across the finish line!

Youth Astronomer Program:

At this writing, there are only 5 Youth Astronomer Observing Program Certificates granted by the Astronomical League. Our 3 candidates and their mentor, Jeff Menz, are patiently awaiting cooperation of the skies to allow them time to complete their observations. These youth have been working toward the goal of sketching and observing 25 objects, 5 each from 5 different adult programs for the Silver level award. Should they wish to pursue a higher-level award, they need to sketch and observe, an additional 75 objects selected from the rest of the adult observing programs for the Gold level. If any of them were to complete the Gold level, they would be the first in the nation to do so!

Around town

Generous Neighbors

Highland Woman's Club members Cyndi Huelsman, Mary Jane Cambell, and Paula Post very enthusiastically volunteered to help with our Earth Day 2025 event at Carlyle Lake. Mother nature very enthusiastically decided to dump rain about halfway through the event. Most of the students and teachers ran for their buses. Fortunately, we lost only a few schools and were able to continue sharing telescope views of the Sun for a while, and during the rain, views of the trees across the lake. A card game focusing on light pollution and nocturnal animals tested the students' understanding of the effect of light on the natural world.



Image Taken by Jeff Menz, 4/25/25

First Quarter Moon Days

Jeff Menz has quite a fan base among casual astronomy enthusiasts. These eager observers make note of when RBAC will next have our telescopes set up at Northtown Shopping Center in Highland. In addition to these loyal followers, we indeed have the looky-loos whose favorite question (as they pull up next to us and roll down their window) is “What are you looking at tonight?” I hope we don’t throw them off when we title the event on Monday, September 29th as “International Observe the Moon Night.” Same scopes, same place, just marking the event we celebrate annually.

Sharing Stories: At the outreach on March 25, 2025, Terry Menz was asked to give the talk: “Greek Stories in the Stars”. In this talk I describe how constellations are used for navigation on land and in space. Arianna Taylor, whose daughter Estralla is a member of the club was in attendance. She shared a story of her grandfather who was known to stop the car in what seemed the middle of nowhere to young Arianna and get out and look up at the night sky. When asked, her grandfather would

explain he could tell what direction to go by looking at the constellations above!

Library Telescope Program:

High Point Scientific supplies telescopes for Library Checkout Program

The Library Telescope Program (LTP), a Missouri-based nonprofit, has been granted 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. With this status, the Program is now allowed to solicit donations. According to their website, librarytelescope.org The Library Telescope Program is launching a \$100,000 fundraising campaign in 2025 to lay the foundation for expanded support and outreach. These funds will enable us to develop grant programs for libraries, provide volunteer training, offer marketing assistance, and establish the groundwork for our new entity. In collaboration with supporting organizations, we will pursue this goal through multiple campaigns, each led by a dedicated team leader with a targeted fundraising objective. Together, we can empower public libraries and schools to offer telescopes for checkout—just like books!” The LTP Program now has a dedicated marketing person, Kaila Schmidt, who is currently drafting a flyer for promoting the LTP to libraries.

High Point Scientific is the current vendor for the library telescopes. At this time, they have the Zhumell Z114: Library Telescope Edition in stock with approximately 10 remaining at this writing. We are awaiting release of a model built with the specific library telescope modifications requested by the Program.

Organizational Contact Information:
High Point Scientific: Robert Dugan,
President, (800) 266-9590,
robert@highpointscientific.com

Library Telescope Program: Donald Ficken, President, (636) 861-9630, dficken@librarytelescope.org

About High Point Scientific: Founded with the mission to offer high-quality telescopes and astrophotography equipment at low prices without compromising on customer service, HPS is dedicated

to serving the astronomy community with exceptional products, support and educational resources.

Website: <https://www.highpointscientific.com>

About the Library Telescope Program: The Library Telescope Program fosters scientific literacy, stimulates interest in astronomy, and offers the awe and excitement of exploring the night sky to those who may have never looked through a telescope. Website:

<https://www.librarytelescope.org/>.

By the Way

Focus on Light Pollution Awareness

To recognize April 21 – 28: International Dark Sky Week and April 22 Earth Day, many activities during this month focused on Light Pollution. Utilizing a kit from the organization Globe at Night, children's books and resources from the International Dark Sky Association, RBAC made presentations to youth at Latzer Library, Mascoutah High School, and Carlyle Lake. For Latzer Library, a story time included a book entitled Skywatcher by Jamie Hogan followed by making masks of nocturnal animals afterwards. We also included a focus on borrowing the Library Telescope and/or binoculars to enjoy skies free of light pollution! On 4/16/25, Terry Menz presented a webinar for the Library Telescope Program describing ways libraries can incorporate children's literature with a focus on light pollution and the telescopes and binoculars available at participating libraries.



Terry Menz shares Skywatcher with Latzer Library patrons. 4/19/25

Club News

Elections: A bylaws change is in the works to set the term of office to 3 years instead of the current 1 year.

New Board elections were held at the March 1 meeting following Randy Harrison's resignation as President. The new President is Jeff Menz. The remaining officers have agreed to continue in their roles: Dan Brandon, Vice President; Spencer Chapman, Treasurer; Terry Menz, Secretary. In addition, Dave Kirsch has agreed to be our League Correspondent.

Dashboard

| Benchmark | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|-----------------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Outreach Events | 60 | 40 | 33 | 13 |
| Event hours | 117 | 110.75 | 71 | 39.5 |
| Venues | 39 | 29 | 31 | 9 |
| Number of Towns | 24 | 18 | 19 | 5 |
| Visitors | 3059 | 3463 | 1268 | 655 |
| Member hours | 509.5 | 528.25 | 364 | 201.5 |

Outreach Photos

GS Campout at Torqua



Comet Chef Jeff showing of his creation at Camp Torqua on 11/15/24. (Photo by Terry Menz)

Centralia Youth Astronomy



Dan Brandon with parent at Centralia Astronomy Club meeting, 2/22/25. (Photo by Hollie Cottone)



Dave Kirsch shares telescope view with Cub Scouts. (Photo by Mo Johnson) 4/9/25



Terry Menz asking youth "Why are there more craters on the Moon than on Earth?" (Photo by Hollie Cottone)

Columbia Middle School at Valmeyer



Jeff Menz explains how the concave telescope mirror works (Photo by Amber Haven)

Cub Scouts at Eden Church, Edwardsville



Jeff Menz sharing view through telescope with Cub Scout. (Photo by Mo Johnson)



Terry Menz explains how our sun generates energy. (Photo by Amber Haven) 4/11/25

Cub Scouts at Korte Lake



Jeff Menz assists young observer. (Photo by Brittany Kamp). 4/12/25

Earth Day Celebrations Latzer Memorial Library 4/19/25



A library patron tries out the library binoculars. (Photo by Donna Plocher)



Terry Menz explaining the guides provided with the library telescope. (Photo by Donna Plocher)



Highland Womans Club volunteers prepare materials for masks. (Photo by Donna Plocher)

Earth Day at Carlyle Lake



Jeff Menz with his 10" Dob which spent part of the day under a pop-up during a pop-up shower. (Photo by Terry Menz) 4/25/25



Womans Club volunteers reading clues while students see if they have the corresponding card. (Photo by Terry Menz)



Jeff Menz explaining to students how telescopes work. (Photo by Terry Menz)

Mascoutah High School



Jeff Menz showing students some photos taken with mobile phone using a mount on his telescope. (Photo by Terry Menz)



Dave Kirsh aligning his telescope. (Photo by Terry Menz)



Kerry Brethauer aligning his telescope. (Photo by Terry Menz)



Kerry Brethaur and Estralla Taylor (Photo by Terry Menz) 4/23/25

Cub Scouts, First Methodist, O'Fallon



Terry Menz reviews rules for safe observing with the troop and leaders. (Photo by Bill Breeden)



Jeff Menz, Robert Hoffmaster, and Kerry Brethauer setting up telescopes. (Photo by Bill Breeden)



Bill and Rita Breeden came out for the evening! (Photo by Jeff Menz) 5/10/25

Gallery



Moon occulting Mars. 1/13/25. (Photo by Jeff Menz)



Lunar Eclipse 3/14/25. (Photo by Jeff Menz)

New Members:

Jessica Amann, February 2025

Bo Hillebrand, March 2025

Estralla Taylor, March 2025

Upcoming Events

- Weingarten in Belleville, July 5, 8-10 pm.
- Chautauqua Speaker Series, Grafton, July 7, 10:45 am - 12:00 noon.
- First Quarter Moon Night, July 7, 7-10 pm, Northtown, Highland
- Nebraska Star Party, July 20-25, Merritt Reservoir - [Link](#)
- RBAC Meeting, July 26, 7-9 pm Salem UCC, Alhambra
- First Quarter Moon Night, Aug 4, 7-10 pm, Northtown, Highland
- Light Pollution/Perseid Meteor Shower, Aug 13, 6:30-7:30 pm,

Watershed Nature Center,
Edwardsville

- Glen Carbon Park, Sept 1, 5:30 – 9:30 pm
- Dobsonfest, Stacey Park, Olivette, Sept 13, 6 – 10 pm. [Link](#)
- Okie-Tex Star Party, Sep 19-27, near Kenton, OK - [Link](#)
- Illinois Dark Skies Star Party, Sept. 18, 19, 20, 2025, Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish & Wildlife Area- [Link](#)
- First Quarter Moon Night, Sep 29, 7-10 pm, Northtown, Highland
- DarkSky Missouri Festival, Oct 17-18, near Big Spring - Van Buren, MO - [Link](#)
- RBAC Meeting, Oct 25, 7-9 pm Salem UCC, Alhambra
- First Quarter Moon Night, Oct 27, 7-9 pm, Northtown, Highland
- Glen Carbon Library, Nov 4, 2025, 7 to 9 pm.
- RBAC Meeting, Nov 22, 7-9 pm Salem UCC, Alhambra
- First Quarter Moon Night, Nov 24, 7-9 pm, Northtown, Highland
- First Quarter Moon Night, Dec 29, 7-9 pm, Northtown, Highland