



August, 2005

Volume XXXV, Issue 8

Executive Board

PRESIDENT

Chuck Cardona III '06
 Programs & Publicity Chair
 631-727-6769
chaz@owl.net

VICE PRESIDENT

Bob Vanson '06
 Radio Astronomy Chair
 631-218-2350
bvanson@aol.com

TREASURER

Barbara Lebkuecher '06
 631-722-3850
barbaraleb@aol.com

SECRETARY

Donna L. McCormick '06
 631-696-3333
mccormick@scientific-consultants.com

FINANCE CHAIR

Bill Bogardus '06
 631-474-2723
wbogardu@optonline.net

DIRECTORS

Alarico Verticchio '07
 631-727-8393
akam10@optonline.net

Dr. Jeffrey Katz '07
 631-696-3333
katz@scientific-consultants.com

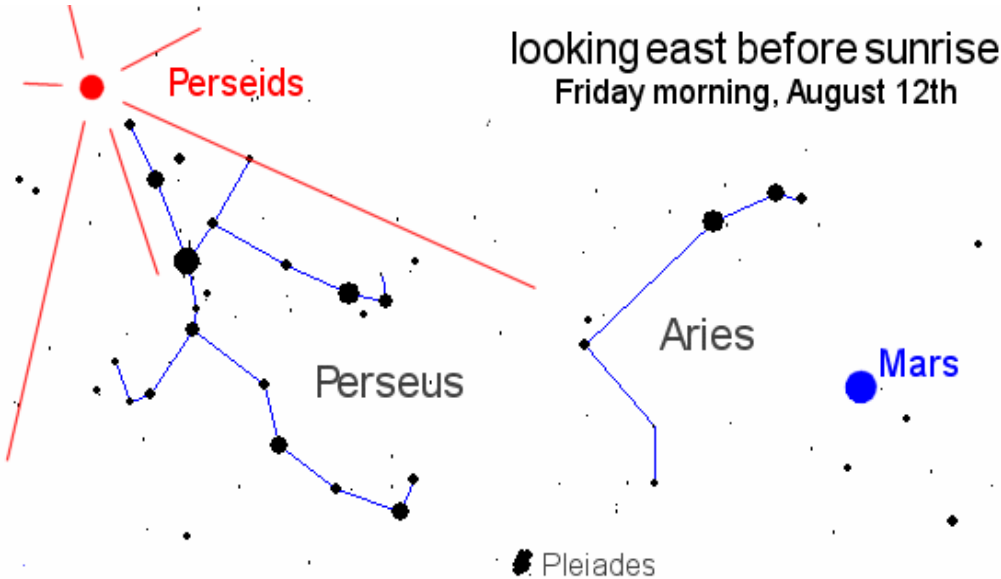
Rich Huber '06

631-598-4613
raflash99@aol.com

Kurt Massey '06

631-325-2123
kamassey@peconic.net

August is the Month for the Perseids!



looking east before sunrise
 Friday morning, August 12th

A meteor 'shower' is named for the point in the sky from where the meteors appear to radiate from; this point is called the 'radiant' point. Every year from late July through early to mid August, we have the opportunity to observe one of the more famous of these meteor showers whose radiant point is in the constellation Perseus. Observed under dark skies, the Perseids can provide a thrilling and spectacular light show that would rival the best man-made fireworks display so often associated with Summer. An added attraction to this year's Perseid display is the proximity of the planet Mars to the radiant point. At almost -1.00 magnitude, Mars is prominently placed in neighboring Aries and will provide a stunning backdrop to this year's event.

Events for August

Art Show Opening;
 Saturday, August 6, 7:00 P.M.

Perseid Meteor Shower;
 Saturday, August 13, 7:30 P.M.

Please refer to the 2005 program calendar inside for additional details concerning these and other, upcoming events.

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Editor's Column

<p>Tom Madigan, Editor Tom Madigan 99 North Summit Ave. Patchogue, NY 11772-2226 tmadigan@optonline.net 631-714-4388</p> <p>Cutoff for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication</p> <p>Visit the new Custer Website at http://www.custerobservatory.org Custer Comment Archive: http://tmadigan.home.netcom.com/custer</p>	<p>The Custer Comment is published monthly by</p> <p>Custer Institute P.O. Box 1204 Main Bayview Road Southold, NY 11971 631-765-2626</p> <p><i>"I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Sarah Williams</i></p>
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Wishing everyone a safe and restful summer....

Best,

Tom

Tom Madigan, Editor

Gift Corner & Classifieds

<p>WE HAVE METEORITES.</p> <p>Great sets mounted in beautiful display cases. Perfect for gifts.</p> <p>Custer coffee mugs, only \$4. Do you have <i>yours</i> yet?</p>	<p>The Gift Shop still has a dwindling number of copies of ASTRONOMY FOR ALL AGES, by Philip Harrington & Edward Pascuzzi, just \$20. As an added bonus, copies are signed by Ed Pascuzzi. We also have copies of PARALLAX by Alan W. Hirshfeld, guest speaker at the 2003 Jamboree. Quantities are limited so hurry and add this well-written and informative volume to your collection while supplies last.</p>	<p>We have Susan Harder's patented & dark sky friendly PARSHIELD® OUTDOOR FLOODLIGHT SHIELDS for PAR 38 type bulbs. Controls glare, reduces light trespass & allows you to direct the light where you need it. Two shields per box in your choice of Off White or Bronze finish for \$20.00, tax incl.</p>
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Fall 2005 Astronomy Class: Discover Astronomy

Custer Board Member, Jeffrey Owen Katz, Ph.D., will teach this five week course which is primarily designed for newcomers to the field of astronomy, but will also cover subjects of interest to experienced astronomers. Topics will include: astronomy basics, finding your way around the night sky, the use of star and planetary charts and software, observing with the naked eye and through Custer's many telescopes, astrophotography, updates on current NASA missions (including viewing images with 3-D glasses), and much more. There are lots of interesting things to learn and amazing new things to see. Students are invited to remain at Custer for the evening, participate in any other events that are scheduled, and enjoy refreshments while our staff shows you around the night sky.

Classes will be held from 6:00 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. Sat. evenings: Sept. 10, 17, 24, Oct. 1, 8 & 15.

Pre-registration required. Cost: \$35 for Custer members; \$50 for non-members. Send your check or money order with the form below to: Custer Institute, P.O. Box 1204, Main Bayview Road, Southold, NY 11971. For further information call Dr. Katz at 631-696-3333 or email jeffkatz@scientific-consultants.com.

Please consider becoming a member of Custer. We are a nonprofit organization (est. 1927), staffed by volunteers, and we rely on dues, proceeds from events, and the generosity of the community for our survival. Your membership will not only help us continue to provide educational, cultural, and research programs, but will support our current efforts to expand our facility and services.

Name _____ Email _____
Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____

I am a Custer Member. Enclosed is my \$35 registration fee.

I am not a Custer Member. Enclosed is my \$50 registration fee.

I would like to join Custer. Sign me up as a Member in the following category (pay \$35 class fee):

\$45 Individual; \$60 Family; \$25 Senior (65+); \$25 Junior (12-18)

Enclosed is my check (payable to Custer Inst.) for \$ _____. **Confirmation of registration will only be sent by email.**

Please mail your payment to: Custer Institute, P.O. Box 1204, Main Bayview Road, Southold, New York 11971.

Upcoming Events At Custer

Art Show Opening;

Saturday, August 6, 7:00 P.M.

Custer member and Art Director, Ruth Makofske, has arranged a fascinating exhibit in Custer's own Stokes Hall. Photographers include: Steve Berger, Rory Macnish and Robert Mahnken. Please join us for the opening of this special show.

Perseid Meteor Shower;

Saturday, August 13, 7:30 P.M.

Bring your lawn chair, scopes and binoculars and join us on the lawn for one of the heavens most exciting events.

Discover Astronomy;

Saturdays, Sept. 10, 17, Oct. 1, 8 & 15, 6:00 - 7:30 P.M.

Custer Board member, Jeffrey Owen Katz, Ph.D. will teach this five week course which is primarily designed for newcomers to the field of astronomy, but will also cover subjects of interest to experienced astronomers. Please refer to the full page course description and enrollment application on page 4 of this issue.

Concert And Musical History Program;

Saturday, Sept. 24, 7:00 P.M.

This evening will feature performance by the Homegrown String Band and discussion of musical history. Refreshments will be available. Observation through Custer's telescopes will follow, weather permitting.

Custer's 27th Annual Astronomy Jamboree

November 4 - 6.

Check back with us closer to the date for the full program and other details.

Every Saturday From Sunset Until Midnight

Weather permitting, each Saturday Custer staff will be on hand to assist you in observing the night sky using Custer's telescopes, and to answer your questions about astronomy and the organization itself.

If you're not already, please consider becoming a member of Custer. Custer Institute is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1927. We're staffed entirely by volunteers and rely on dues, proceeds from events, and the generosity of the community for our survival. Your membership will not only help us continue to provide educational, cultural and research programs, but will support our current efforts to expand our facility and services.

Heavenly Events To Watch For August, 2005

“ Call it what you will.
Newton did.
Whatever you call it, it is soundless.
It works in the falling acorn,
the brown leaf,
in your every footfall,
the gravity of it all. “

- Burnham Eaton

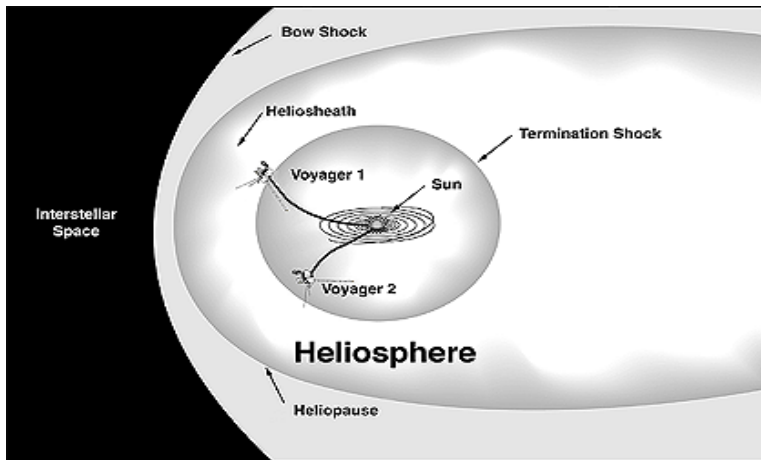
During the latter half of August MERCURY bounces above the eastern horizon before sunrise, reaching its peak on the 26th, then drops back into hiding after month's end. Though brief, this is the first of its two good morning appearances for this year. VENUS, showing no bounce whatsoever - just brilliance - drifts lazily southward above the western horizon in the sunset twilight. MARS, passing from Pisces to Cetus to Aries early this month, seems to be putting on the brakes in its prograde (eastward) flight. This means that we're getting ready for another close encounter of the red kind this fall. By month's end -1.0 magnitude Mars is rising around 10:30 PM and is due south around 5:30 AM, after

daybreak. Low in the southwest before dark, -1.8 magnitude JUPITER closes the gap between itself and Venus. Now in Cancer the Crab, SATURN appears low in the east at daybreak late in the month. URANUS spends the year in the wilderness of Aquarius this year; it reaches opposition at the very end of August and is in the sky all night. NEPTUNE also reaches opposition, but on the 8th of August, and is still in Capricornus the Goat. Whereabouts of Uranus and Neptune can be determined by using charts (maps) found in the June Sky & Telescope (page 72), or in the 2005 Observers Handbook or the 2005 Astronomical Calendar.

- 7 The thin waxing crescent Moon sets beneath Venus this evening. Can you make it out with binoculars? Without binoculars?
- 8 Neptune is at opposition, 2,793 million miles from the Sun (and 2,698 million miles from us.) At 7.8 magnitude, it's about 1.2° northeast of the 4th magnitude star θ (Theta) Capricorni.
- 10 The crescent Moon leads Jupiter down in the southwest.
- 12 The Moon sets in time to allow for a nice, dark predawn sky for the Perseid meteor shower. Look for Perseus rising fairly high in the northeast, lie back and enjoy the show.
- 19 Full Sturgeon Moon is near perigee again, so a storm at this time could produce tidal floods.
- 23 Mercury is at greatest elongation west of the Sun. This morning it rises along the eastern horizon about 4:50 AM.
- 25 The waning gibbous Moon pairs up with Mars in the predawn sky.
- 31 Saturn appears to the right of the thin crescent Moon by daybreak this morning.
- 31 Uranus is at opposition tonight, 1,842 million miles out beyond Earth. This 5.7 magnitude green gas world is now about 3° southwest of the 4th magnitude star λ (Lambda) Aquarii.
- Sept. 1 This evening and tomorrow evening watch Jupiter glide by Venus on its journey toward the solar farside.

Prepared by Robert Chapin

Voyager 1 Crosses Multiple Thresholds



Image, courtesy NASA/JPL

As the Sun orbits the center of the Milky Way galaxy, the Heliosphere moves as well, creating a bow shock ahead of it in interstellar space.

Having far surpassed every conceivable technical expectation, the spacecraft is now traveling in the Heliosheath, that region of the Heliosphere between the Termination Shock and the Heliopause. If the onboard radioactive fuel lasts long enough, mission scientists and all of humanity will have a singular opportunity to collect data from the Heliopause and learn about that region of the Heliosphere where the solar wind yields completely to the Interstellar wind. At this point, Voyager 1 will truly be mankind's first starship. Based on current models of the Heliosphere and at its present course and speed, Voyager 1 should cross this 'final frontier' and 'go where no one has gone before' on or before 2020. Based on its current consumption and remaining compliment of fuel, scientists are confident that the spacecraft will achieve this Holy Grail of space exploration.

Traveling at over 1.6 million kilometers / day, Voyager 1 was 94 Astronomical Units (AU) or more than 14 billion kilometers from the sun at the beginning of 2005. It is traveling north in the direction of the solar apex (the direction of the sun's motion relative to nearby stars) at 35° to the plane of the ecliptic towards the constellation Ophiuchus. Voyager 2, traveling at a slightly slower speed than Voyager 1, is almost 12 billion kilometers from the sun and traveling south at 48° to the plane of the ecliptic.

After operating continuously for over 27 years, both spacecraft are still functioning well and returning valuable data. Each Voyagers' cosmic ray detector, magnetometer, plasma wave detector and low-energy charged particle detector are all still operational. In addition, the Ultraviolet Spectrometer on Voyager 1 and the Plasma Science instrument on Voyager 2 continue to return data.

Interesting Voyager facts:

- Voyager 1 will pass within 1.6 light years of AC+79 3888 in Camelopardalis in 40,000 years;
- Voyager 2 will pass within 4.3 light years of Sirius in 296,000 years.

For additional data and details or to read further about this fascinating mission, please visit the Voyager mission home page at <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov> . Some of the other web sites include <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/science/index.html> , <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/jpl/missions/voyager.html> , http://www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/solarsystem/voyager_agu.html and <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/mission/weekly-reports/index.htm> .

Welcome To Our New Or Returning Members

Welcome one and all!

New, returning or regular members:

Do you own or have access to a personal computer? Do you have Internet access? If the answer to both of these questions is “yes”, why not send me your email address and receive the Custer Comment electronically? Some of the immediate benefits are:

- Immediate delivery to your inbox; no lost, late or tattered issues;
- Print only what you want;
- Active links to relevant websites and content;
- Color photos;
- Electronic bulletins and alerts delivered directly to your inbox;
- No postage, mailing or printing expenses, providing an immediate cost savings for Custer. The saved revenue can be used to help fund all the exciting new projects and initiatives currently underway.

To receive the Custer Comment electronically, simply send an email to tmadigan@optonline.net with your name and “Electronic Mailing” in the subject line and I’ll take care of the rest.

Liftoff!

Space Shuttle Returns To Flight After Spectacular Launch



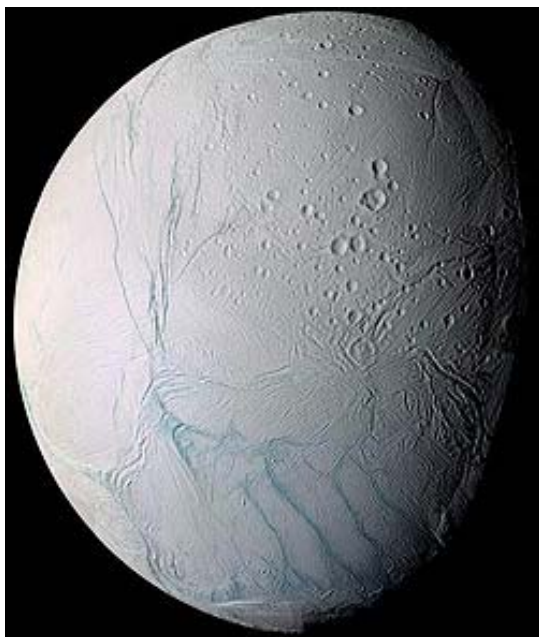
Image, courtesy NASA

View of Space Shuttle Discovery lifting off launch pad 39B a split second after ignition of its 3 main engines and 2 solid-rocket boosters.

Kennedy Space Center
Tuesday, July 26th, 2005

Under a beautiful Florida sky with scattered fair-weather clouds, NASA's Return to Flight Mission, STS-114, lifted off launch pad 39B at 10:39 AM, EDT. Originally scheduled for Wednesday, July 13th, the launch was scrubbed due to a faulty backup fuel sensor. With an eye towards disaster prevention, the launch was photographed from every conceivable angle and location. Of particular interest is the introduction of a backward looking camera mounted between the Shuttle and the large, external fuel tank. Aside from providing a breathtaking view of the rapidly receding surface below, this vantage point gives mission controllers and engineers the ability to spot any damage early on, thus providing the crew and Mission Control with all possible options for recovery or rescue. For the latest news, updates and images, please visit NASA's Return to Flight home page at: <http://www.nasa.gov/returntoflight/main>

Enceladus Flyby



Image, courtesy NASA / JPL

This false color image of Enceladus was acquired on July 14th, 2005 by the Cassini spacecraft on its latest flyby of the icy moon. This image is a mosaic of 21 separate images obtained with Cassini's narrow-angle camera from distances ranging between 61,000 Km and 11,000 Km.

Cassini Finds Recent & Unusual Geology on Enceladus

NASA's Cassini spacecraft has obtained new, detailed images of the south polar region of Saturn's moon Enceladus. The data reveal distinctive geological features and the most youthful terrain yet seen on this enigmatic moon. The data indicate a very complex evolutionary history for Saturn's brightest, whitest satellite. This latest flyby brought the spacecraft to within 175 Km of Enceladus' surface and revealed terrain near the moon's south pole almost devoid of impact craters, implying recent activity. This area is covered with house-sized ice boulders, carved out by recent tectonic activity, unique to this region. A cursory inspection of this image and others reveals a terrain that varies widely in texture and surface topography from one quadrant or hemisphere to another. This variation, it is theorized, has been caused by differential rotation of Enceladus over time, and may provide clues to what kind of geologic activity has apparently wracked the surface. One of the brightest natural satellites in the solar system, Enceladus has an albedo approaching that of freshly fallen snow.

The latest updates and images from Cassini can be found at NASA's Cassini home page: <http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/home> .

Stars Struck By “Senseless” Levy Veto

By Kitty Merrill, East Hampton Independent

It didn't take an astrologer to predict. As expected, last week Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy vetoed Legislator Jay Schneiderman's request for funding to create an observatory in Montauk. Last month Schneiderman successfully persuaded colleagues on the legislature to support a \$200,000 appropriation for the purchase of a research caliber telescope. The hope was to use the instrument as a focal point of a Dark Sky Park at Third House in Montauk. But hopes are meant for dashing, pessimists might say, with pragmatists adding, especially during an election year. Levy vetoed the measure on Wednesday. And supporters are not necessarily buying why.

Schneiderman's bill sought to amend this year's capital budget to purchase the telescope and construct a shed to hold ancillary equipment.

In 1989 county voters approved a referendum that put a cap on midyear capital budget amendments. By law, nothing new can be added unless it has been offset by an equivalent amount taken from a line elsewhere in the budget. Schneiderman's request failed to provide such an offset, Levy asserted in his veto message. The message continues, "The importance of this veto goes far beyond the \$200,000 in appropriations. Passing this bill without this offset would thwart the express will of the people by circumventing a charter law that was approved at public referendum and undermine the integrity of the entire Capital Budget process." Overriding his veto, Levy warned, will "completely eviscerate" the explicit wishes of the voters and "completely compromise" the principle of fiscal discipline on which the budget cap initiative was founded. "In short, there will no longer be a Capital Budget process," the message states. It goes on to reiterate cautionary comments from the Legislative Office of Budget Review, which speak of growing debt service costs and emphasize the importance of placing controls on the capital program. "I have no idea what relationship the veto message has to the bill at all," Eric Brown, Schneiderman's chief of staff said this week. "It makes no sense. It's as if we had a bill that said 'Oranges are great,' and he came back talking about apples." The veto message speaks of the need to curtail issuing bonds for projects, when "we aren't bonding for the observatory," Brown said. Chief Deputy County Executive Paul Sabatino countered that the veto message speaks holistically to the impact additional projects will have on the budget. Bonded or not, extra projects will still drive up taxes, he said, echoing Levy's fiscal refrain "We can't have it all."

Steve, What's Up?

Additionally, Brown argued, "The county executive says he is concerned about debt, but he's approved much larger projects up west. What's up with that?" Among the green-lighted initiatives is a project that's triple the cost of the observatory, a \$600,000 allocation to build a football field at Babylon High School.

According to Levy spokesman Mark Smith, Levy let the measure stand. The school district's voters will have to approve their share of the million-dollar project, \$400,000. "As if they're going to say no to getting a new facility for less than half the cost," Brown derided. He concluded, "The county executive has a right to veto, but I would expect it would have some relationship to the legislation."

According to insiders, the move may have more of a relationship to the coming election. Erstwhile Levy speechwriter Tim Motz is running against Schneiderman. County GOP sources say that means the CE will be pressured by the Democratic Party to sabotage Schneiderman-sponsored initiatives.

Even Susan Harder, of the nonpartisan Dark Sky Society, hinted as much in reaction to the veto. "Since the observatory makes perfect sense for the county, we need to know the real reasons for Levy's veto," she said, "Saying it is a financial drain is simply not good enough since this project will generate not only funds for the county, but great educational opportunities, complementing the Vanderbilt planetarium, which is funded with millions of county dollars, and Island university programs in astronomy. Suffolk residents, including thousands of amateur and professional astronomers will be disappointed that County Executive Levy did not see through partisan politics to approve the observatory."

Supporters plan to lobby the legislature for a veto override. Based on information provided by Schneiderman, The Independent previously reported that the veto would stand, since the legislature wasn't due to meet in the time required to vote to override. The body meets on August 8, it has until August 15 to vote.

Reproduced with permission from:

<http://www.indyeastend.com/cgi-bin/indep/news.cgi?action=article&category=News&id=7461>

Editor: I recently published alerts concerning Suffolk bills IR 1652, establishing a 'Dark Sky' park at Montauk's Roosevelt Park and IR 1654 to fund an observatory, equipped with a university-class 24" telescope, at the same park. Since those alerts were published in July's Custer Comment, Suffolk Executive Steve Levy has signed IR 1652, establishing Roosevelt Park as a 'Dark Sky' park and vetoed IR 1654, citing budgetary concerns.

A Sidewalk Astronomer

A film about Astronomy, Cosmology and John Dobson

As published in July's Custer Comment, the Pioneer Theater (<http://www.twoboost.com/pioneer>), located at 155 East 3rd Street at Avenue A in downtown Manhattan had featured the above titled film between July 6th and July 12th. The film is 78 minutes long and is produced and directed by Jeffrey F. Jacobs (<http://www.telescopepictures.com>). Custer member Joan Baffa, who commutes everyday to Manhattan from western Suffolk, decided to 'brave the neighborhood' (the neighborhood is actually quite good) and take in the film after work. Not only did she take the time to see the film, after working a full day in Manhattan with the 2 hour round-trip travel time, she was so impressed by the film that she actually *went back to her office* after the film (about 11:00 PM) to send me an email, letting me know how the film was and that her review would be forthcoming. As promised, she wrote her review which is furnished below:

On the evening of July 12th, I attended the viewing of the movie entitled A SIDEWALK ASTRONOMER, a film about astronomy, cosmology and John Dobson, photographed, produced and directed by Jeffrey Fox Jacobs, at The Pioneer Theater in downtown NYC.

I enjoyed the movie very much--it was educational, enlightening and, as with anything involving Mr. Dobson, extremely entertaining. John Dobson is a very deep thinker, ranking up there with Einstein, Galileo and Newton--talk about thinking "outside of the box." John is a member of the Vedanta Monastery in Sacramento and touched on religion during the movie. His beliefs are interesting and well-founded (whether or not you agree with him).

The movie eloquently portrays John's love of our planet as well as the ignorance of the general public regarding same (this writer included). Though I deserved an "A" in my Astronomy class in college, I am not able to retain the information I learned. It's amazing how this 89-year old gentlemen can remember everything he's learned, taught or seen during his time on this earth. I found his knowledge and demeanor very impressive and, at times, intimidating. There were a couple of points that he was trying to make regarding space and time that I could not decipher. I'm looking forward to examining his readings and forthcoming books to gain additional insight into what he was trying to convey.

After the movie, there was a brief Q&A period where most people complimented the movie and John Dobson's contribution to the world of amateur astronomy. No one can deny that he continually touches people's lives and though he could have made millions of dollars with his Dobsonian telescopes, he chose, instead, to share his concepts with the world. One gentleman questioned his credentials regarding some of the statements he made about The Big Bang Theory, religion, and vitamins. It's this writer's opinion that he is just as qualified, if not more qualified, than anyone professing to be an expert in these fields today.

I inquired of Mr. Jacobs about what input Mr. Dobson had on the final outcome of the movie and Mr. Jacobs said that he just started to reveal the first "draft" of the movie to John when Mr. Dobson yelled, "Stop! You can't use that title. Change the title from The Sidewalk Astronomer to A Sidewalk Astronomer." I think this speaks volumes about the man and his selflessness.

If you'd like more information, please see the attached. Also, kindly refer to the link below for information about getting Mr. Dobson to visit Custer! <http://www.johndobson.org/schevent.html>

*Many thanks,
J.A. Baffa*

Editor: The attachment Joan refers to is a scan of the movie flyer provided by the theater to their patrons. Anyone wishing a copy, please send me an email with "Dobson film" as the subject. Please note, this flyer will only be provided electronically. **Thank you**, Joan, for your efforts and for sharing your thoughts.

This Issue of the Custer Comment was professionally printed by our friends at

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Tom Madigan, Editor
The Custer Comment
99 North Summit Ave
Patchogue, NY 11772

Address Service Requested

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