

**Grand Rapids Amateur Astronomical
Association & James C. Veen Observatory**

2026 Activities Guide



www.graaa.org



616-897-7065



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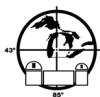
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graaa.org/discord

3308 Kissing Rock Ave SE
Lowell, MI 49331

GRAAA's Mission Statement: “To promote community interest and participation in astronomy through outreach, education, and research”



The Grand Rapids Amateur Astronomical Association (GRAAA) is a non-profit (501(c)(3)) group of astronomy enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds, drawn together by a common interest in the wonders of the universe. Learn how you can become a member at graaa.org/membership.



A variety of events and activities, including featured speakers, learning opportunities, and more, take place throughout the year. Scheduling varies, but GRAAA events are concentrated on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. There are also opportunities for student members. Add events to your calendar now, and keep up with updates on social media and at graaa.org/events.



Additional events and popups provide unique opportunities, including noted speakers, special interest discussions, impromptu observing sessions, and more. Look for alerts through GRAAA social media, Discord, and text notifications.



The James C. Veen Observatory, named after a co-founder and first president of GRAAA, is the crown jewel of the Association. Learn more about this remarkable facility and procedures to gain access for personal use of its multiple telescopes at graaa.org/veen. Member privileges also include personal use of the McCarthy Family Pavilion, Strikwerda Annex, fire pit area, and DeBruyn Pathways that are part of the natural beauty surrounding the facility.



Public Observing Nights at Veen are listed later in this Guide, and you are invited to volunteer at these twice-monthly events which help GRAAA meet our outreach and financial goals. Gain experience with the observatory and make wonderful new friends, all while providing vital volunteer support. Sign up to help out at tinyurl.com/GRAAA-SignUp-2026.



GRAAA on social media: We have an active presence on Instagram at [@gr_astronomy](https://www.instagram.com/gr_astronomy), Facebook at facebook.com/GrandRapidsAstronomy, and our “GRAAA Community” Facebook group.



GRAAA Education and YouTube Channel: View archived presentations and informative guides to amateur astronomy at graaa.org/education and youtube.com/@gr_astronomy. Also check out online articles by GRAAA contributors at graaa.org/blog.



NASA Night Sky Network: GRAAA is a partner in these periodic online presentations by noted astronomers and space science specialists. Learn more at nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov.



GRAAA Discord server: Join our online community to connect with and learn from fellow GRAAA members, especially our active astrophotography group, at graaa.org/discord.



Email and text alerts: Members are automatically added to GRAAA's email list, plus you can opt-in for text alerts at graaa.org/texts. Receive notifications directly to your phone about transient sky events, GRAAA popups, meeting reminders, and other useful information.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Dr. Shannon Schmoll: Tuesday January 20, 7:00pm, Public Museum ***Astronomical Discovery—Highlights from the Year 2025***

The Director of Abrams Planetarium at Michigan State University is a leader in astronomy education. Her summary of recent advances and discoveries is a highlight of the annual Great Lakes Planetarium Association conference. She will share her latest version with us as a fitting start to our 2026 schedule.

Dr. Jeanette Epps: Saturday February 21, 11:00am, Public Museum ***Roger That Keynote: My Life as a NASA Astronaut***

Among Dr. Epps's multitude of experiences as a NASA astronaut, a journey which began in 2009, was spending 233 days as a mission specialist aboard the International Space Station. She also served as a Capsule Communicator for space walks, and in numerous other capacities that demonstrated her leadership. She has authored technical publications and received many awards for performance and service. Seating is limited for this event, and Museum admission is required. Advance registration and more information at grpm.org/rogerthat.

Mark Craig: Wednesday April 29, 7:00pm, Public Museum ***Apollo 1: A Feature Documentary***

This is a definitive account of the tragic 1967 spacecraft fire that took the lives of three pioneering astronauts, including Roger B. Chaffee from Grand Rapids. Producer Mark Craig interviewed and filmed many individuals involved in Project Apollo, including astronaut families. He will describe some of his experiences prior to a screening of this all-new film.

Dr. Michael West: Thursday October 22, 7:00pm, Venue TBD ***Looking Up for a Living: Stories from Chile, Hawaii, & the Edge of Space***

A highlight of 2026 will be a visit by noted researcher and award-winning astronomy communicator Michael West. Dr. West has explored the universe on its grandest scales, mapping vast cosmic structures and studying cannibal galaxies. He has worked with some of the world's largest telescopes, both on the ground and in space, including the Hubble Space Telescope. For the past decade, he was part of a team at Lowell Observatory that brought together science, education, and public outreach. Dr. West will share career highlights and personal stories, including how Carl Sagan helped inspire his lifelong passion for astronomy.

Dr. Kirk Korista: Thursday November 19, 7:00pm, Public Museum ***Stars Without Nuclear Fusion: The Physics Without the Confusion***

Our longtime friend (a professor of Physics at Western Michigan University) will return to explain that, while nuclear fusion is key to the evolution of stars, there are misconceptions that lead to confusion about how stars work. Explore with Dr. Korista the nature of stars without nuclear fusion, and how their behavior compares to stars that shine through fusion reactions.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Exploring the Current Sky with Naked Eye and Telescope

Three Tuesdays: February 17, May 19, September 15

7:00pm, Public Museum's Chaffee Planetarium

Three seasonal sessions in the Chaffee Planetarium will include orientation to the most prominent stars, planets, and constellations of the current sky, plus simulated deep sky objects. Gain practical knowledge to better appreciate a rewarding hobby, including tips for dealing with seasonal environmental challenges and light pollution. Sessions facilitated by David DeBruyn, assisted by other veteran observers.

Introduction to Amateur Astronomy Series

Three Saturdays: February 7, March 7, March 28

10:30am, Public Museum

Note: *Introduction to Amateur Astronomy* sessions are free to GRAAA members and open to the public with paid Museum admission. Recommended for ages 12 and up.

★ ***The Ever-Changing Sky in 2026: February 7, 10:30am***

The first class will be under the planetarium sky and will include information about sky motions, celestial highlights of various seasons, and what to look for this year with naked eye, binoculars, and small telescopes.

★ ***Getting the Most from a New Hobby: March 7, 10:30am***

This class will explore challenges faced by those new to amateur astronomy. What are the best options for star charts, telescopes, accessories, and online resources? Learn useful tips for effective observing under all conditions.

★ ***Telescope Advice and Tune-up Clinic: March 28, 10:30am***

Participants can bring their personal telescopes for minor repairs and to obtain expert advice for effective use. Included in the session will be a discussion of different telescope options, and how to choose the right one for you.

Digital Imaging: Continuing Series, Veen Observatory

Note: These astrophotography-focused sessions are open to GRAAA members and their guests only.

★ ***Basics and Options for Beginners:***

Sat. May 2, 10:30am-noon (repeat session Tues. May 12, 7:30pm-9:00pm)

Want to take digital images through your telescope but are confused about where to begin? This class is for you. Learn the basics of what it takes to obtain impressive photos of sky objects using available technology, even your cell phone.

★ ***Intermediate & Advanced Imaging for Amateurs:***

Dates and Times TBD

The goal of this continuing series, initiated in 2025, is to promote continued interest and proficiency in celestial imaging. Participants learn from one another through exchange of ideas and experience using personal and Veen Observatory telescopes. More information to come.

ADDITIONAL EVENTS

Telescope and Equipment Swap Meet: Sat. April 18, 11:00am–3:00pm, Community Archives and Research Center (CARC)

An opportunity for GRAAA members and the greater community to exchange or sell unused telescopes and accessories. Display space will be available to all. CARC is located at 223 State St SE.

StarBeQue Family Picnic: Sat. June 27, 6:30pm, Veen Observatory

The annual picnic potluck again brings us together to welcome summer. Food and fellowship is followed by a short program and observing, if clear. Don't miss this highlight social event, especially if you're a new member!

Summer Nights Around the Campfire with Riverside Raconteurs:

Fri. June 26, July 24, and August 28, 7:00pm, Veen Observatory

This is a collaborative event with a longtime storytelling group that enjoys sharing wonderful tales from long ago and today. Bring a lawn chair and snack/beverage if you wish. Sit back and enjoy a unique experience with friends new and old in the natural beauty of Veen Observatory's grounds.

Telescope Tune-up Clinics: Sat. June 20, July 25, August 22, and September 19, prior to Public Nights at Veen Observatory

Telescope clinics are free to GRAAA members and included with paid Public Night admission for non-members. Arrive with your telescope **1.5 hours** before the scheduled start time of the above Public Nights for expert alignment and tips for use.

Holiday Party: Thurs. December 10, 6:30pm, Boulder Creek Golf Club

Celebrate the coming of Christmas, winter solstice, Hanukkah, and other festivals of the season with fellow GRAAA members and families. Make merry while enjoying a buffet dinner and special entertainment. More details to come in late November.

Pop-up Events: Anticipated Events Below, Additional Events TBA

More information announced at graaa.org, Discord, email, and/or text

- ★ **Perseid Meteor Watch** August 12-13 and **Lunar Eclipse Watch** August 27-28. Both events at Cascade Township Park, sky conditions permitting.
- ★ **Dog Days of Summer Brunch** Saturday August 29, 11:00am at the Veen Observatory. Bring a bagged lunch, enjoy the hiking trails and fellowship. View crescent Venus and solar features, sky conditions permitting.
- ★ **Member Star Parties** at Veen Observatory, sky conditions permitting.
- ★ **Virtual presentations** by notable astronomers and others.
- ★ **Telescope orientation sessions** at the Veen Observatory.
- ★ **Transient sky events** such as auroras, comets, daytime solar observing, and possibly supernova.

PUBLIC OBSERVING NIGHTS at Veen Observatory

3308 Kissing Rock Ave SE, Lowell, MI 49331

Public Observing Nights are subject to sky conditions. Status updates at graaa.org, Facebook, Discord, and recorded phone message (616-897-7065) posted no later than 6:30pm on date of event.

2026 Public Observing Night dates, times, and highlights:

April 25	8:00 - 11:00	Statewide Astronomy Night; Moon, Jupiter
May 09	9:30 - 12:00	Jupiter, Venus, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
May 16	9:30 - 12:00	Jupiter, Venus, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
June 06	9:30 - 12:00	Jupiter-Venus Conjunction, Star Clusters
June 20 *	9:30 - 12:00	Moon, Jupiter, Venus, Star Clusters, Nebulas
July 11	9:30 - 12:00	Venus, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
July 25 *	9:30 - 12:00	Moon, Double Stars, Star Clusters, Nebulas
Aug. 08	9:00 - 11:30	Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
Aug. 22 *	9:00 - 11:30	Moon, Double Stars, Star Clusters, Nebulas
Sept. 12	8:30 - 11:00	Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies, Saturn late
Sept. 19 *	8:30 - 11:00	Autumn Astronomy Day; Moon, Saturn, Neptune
Oct. 03	7:30 - 10:00	Saturn, Neptune, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
Oct. 10	7:30 - 10:00	Saturn, Neptune, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies
Oct. 17	7:30 - 10:00	Moon, Saturn, Neptune, Star Clusters, Nebulas
Oct. 24	7:30 - 10:00	Full Moon, Saturn, special effects for Halloween
Nov. 07	6:30 - 9:00	Saturn, Neptune, Star Clusters, Nebulas, Galaxies

* **Telescope Clinics** take place 1.5 hours prior to event start time. Bring your personal telescope for expert guidance on usage and alignment. Free with paid admission. Details under “*Additional Events*” in this Guide.

ADMISSION

Adults	\$5
Under 18	\$3
Under 5	FREE
GRAAA & GRPM members	FREE



Cash preferred, also accept credit cards and checks (payable to GRAAA). Visit **graaa.org** for location, map, group tour information, galleries, and more.

**RETAIN THIS GUIDE IN A SAFE PLACE
FOR FUTURE REFERENCE!**

2026 LEADERSHIP

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GRAND RAPIDS
PUBLIC MUSEUM

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Be curious.

The GRAAA and Veen Observatory receive annual financial and administrative support from the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

Note: Pre-registration for events at GRPM is recommended to help us plan and to ensure a spot for you. Guests and public are welcome. Parking is free for GRAAA members.