

The President's Page

by Charles Osborne

You all get a break this month. No current events like the Wright Brothers or Shuttle crash to get me in the mood to write something eloquent, though there are a handful of news worthy things to comment on.

The Western Conference

What a success! Kudos to Jim Fredsti, Debbie Juliff, and Tony Beasley at Owens Valley Radio Observatory for making it happen. And of course, way to go, for all the speakers and participants. I heard Miller Goss, the VLA Director, attended and was impressed by SARA. Does that open the door for a potential conference at Socorro and the VLA? Never know. Sounds like another venue with potential of drawing a good regional, possibly national, crowd.

We've talked occasionally of doing something like that in place of Green Bank one year. But the staff at NRAO Green Bank are such good hosts, with a super facility, it was a hard case to make. Perhaps its not an either/or situation, and these regional meetings will help galvanize SARA activity in parts of the country where members normally can't afford to journey to the wilds of West Virginia. Looking forward to OVRO, and possibly the NRAO-VLA, hosting regional SARA meetings in coming years.

Video Conferencing

Several have suggested we investigate webcasting the Green Bank conference as Jim Fredsti tried at OVRO. We've made some attempts in this direction at PARI as well and would like to learn more. As I understand it, some of the most prevalent software packages open way too many security holes for most SysAdmins to buy into. Another gotcha can be the need/desire for a steady data flow. This is not normally present unless specially provisioned for, given the bursty nature of Internet downloading at most businesses or ISPs. I've sat thru some really good quality webcasts by Agilent, so it is possible. We'll look into it. SARA members with ideas and experience in this regard, contact me, so we can ask the right questions.

Meantime CDs will always be the fallback point from now on. As Jeff has stated in this issue, the call for papers for Green Bank has started. But as you do your presentation, bear in mind that big bullet points, with you filling in the gaps extemporaneously live, is much less useful to the other 80% of SARA at home just getting the CD or article in the Journal. Try to get as much detail and links in the presentation documentation for Jeff and Gordon as possible.

Mentors and Awards

Jeff's mentor program continues to expand nicely, with 41 SARA "members helping members" so far. A few states are still in need, so if you would be willing to assist a local member (or school teacher or student) with some guidance, email Jeff. See the list on the main SARA webpage: <http://www.qsl.net/SARA/admin/mentors.htm> .

Bob Patterson has proposed a variety of member award certificates for telling the rest of us what you've been up to. Expect details perhaps in this Journal or the next.

The Web

SARA continues to expand our web tutorials and subspecialty content under Paul Shuch's excellent hand. Needed are more member sites hosting. The main pages on <http://www.qsl.net/SARA> can only hold so much. They were envisioned as mostly a common collecting point for what SARA is all about, and links to member sites. If the member doesn't have web space, but has a great article, Paul would put it on the main pages. But big pictures are discouraged. Those are much better candidates for distributed webpages.

Those of you with a few megabytes of web space to spare and a good connection can greatly help out by hosting and maintaining your subspecialty. Whether its: Interferometry, Cosmic Rays, Solar, Meteors, VLF, Gamma Ray Burst follow up / High Energy Pulses, Digital

Signal Processing, Pulsars, Data Format Conversion, Low Noise Amplifiers, Antennas, System Tests, back end electronics, and on and on are examples. If you have a special area of interest, the idea is that you can better keep your own smaller webpage up to date with the answer to the latest questions and developments, than we can. Contact myself or Paul Shuch for details.

The Archive

We are gradually moving toward an online archive of SARA Journals and related documents back to day one, and even before SARA reached critical mass and formed. Mike Gingell has scanned the roughly 5,000 pages! Stay tuned here and to the webpage for details. This may be a "members only site". That seems logical. But we're not sure yet how to go about it, without making keeping the paid member info and passwords up to date, more work than it needs to be. Comments on how to manage this style database/archive issue would be welcome.

Treasurer's Position

After several years as Treasurer, my lovely wife Janis would like to pass the reins of the Treasurer's position to someone new this summer at the Green Bank conference. She's migrated us to a modern Microsoft Access database. So this job entails: paying bills, collecting renewal money, bank deposits, updating the member database, emailing the electronic version of the Journal to the right people, and sending a valid mailing label file to the printer every two months.

Electronic Form of the Journal Changes

About 50% of the members are now getting the electronic form of the Journal. We have switched to a new way of doing the delivery that seems to be working well. Instead of emailing the Journal as an attachment, which might choke your email download or be blocked, we send all paid members a secret website address where the current Journal may be downloaded. This also lets you have several tries at it if you have an ISP that drops the connection during downloads. We are trying to keep the Journal below 1MB for the sake of those on dial up connections. Remember this comes in pdf format with color pictures and higher resolution than the black & white printed version. And for International members it's more timely news and more likely to actually get to you.

One almost humorous problem is that Janis gets renewal letters from some members asking to get the electronic version, and they don't include an email address. This takes a letter and some time to clear up. So please give us a valid email address.

Expirations

Please check your address label, or expiration coded name on the email version. We're patient, too patient. SARA has given away, would you believe, more than 2,000 Journal printed copies in the past 5 years. By that I mean instead of cutting people off, who we know are likely to re-subscribe, we kept sending the Journal. Now the database is in MS Access, and it's much easier to keep up with this, and the cost of this drain on the treasury is becoming obvious. We won't likely be so generous in the future.

Janis has asked me to also mention that the number of email addresses which bounce has gotten quite large on the email version of the Journal. If you have auto forwarding and have changed ISPs, we probably are getting bounced. Many ISPs are also cutting off attachments or bouncing the email. That also may have cost some of your Journals last fall. The Journal has been coming out regularly thanks to Gordon Meldrum and Jeff Lichtman. So if you aren't getting it, check with Janis (josborne1@citcom.net).

There is a tremendous amount going on among SARA members. The important message conveyed by this Journal, our webpage, and our regional SARA conferences, is that it needs to be shared. Few members have all the where-with-all to: write software, build hardware, and do the radio astronomy calculations themselves too. So by sharing our subspecialties we all benefit.