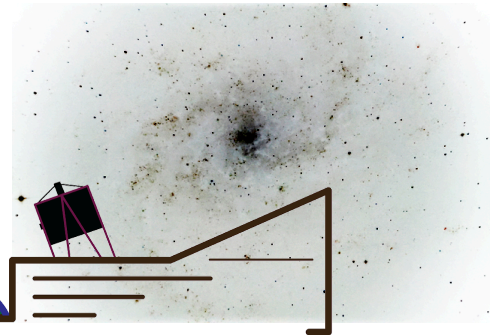


The Fremont Peak Observer

— Bringing Astronomy to the Public —



Vol. 43, No. 1

Spring 2026

President's Message

Pat Donnelly

“Happy 40th Anniversary FPOA!!!” It is very hard to believe that FPOA has been in existence for 40 years. I remember my first visit to the peak in 1986. Although the views were fantastic, the road up to the peak was very scary. This was the day of the dedication of the observatory. I watched Denni Medlock break a champagne bottle on the southwest corner pier and Donn Mukensnoble taking a picture of it. Much has happened since 1986. What began as just a small observatory with a telescope, has now blossomed into a place to visit on many tourist attraction lists. This year, the Star-B-Que will be on September 12, and we plan to have a much larger gathering. We are hoping to have some members of the Department of Parks and Recreations (DPR) and some local politicians attend the event. Mark your calendar now. Also, send us any stories you may have of your visits to the peak over the last 40 years. We shall publish them in future newsletters.

I have to report that there was a major storm at the peak on Christmas. It was one of the most violent storms to occur, during the last 40 years. The maximum wind speed during the storm probably exceeded 110 miles per hour. There was significant damage to the observatory, and led by Eric Eglund, we have been making the necessary repairs. A detailed description of the storm, the damage it caused, and the repair efforts are provided in this newsletter. For all of you familiar with the buildings near the observatory, please check out the picture of the hazmat shed. The roof is gone. Most of the pieces of the roof ended up down by the traffic circle. There is some speculation that there was a Cat.1 tornado due to the excessive damage to the shed. On a much lighter note, there appeared to be no damage to the restrooms nearby. Based upon the amount of damage to the observatory, the FPOA is discussing additional modifications and upgrades to the observatory to make it more storm resistant. We shall probably be doing these upgrades this spring and summer. Please let us know if you can help with the work.

I am very happy to report that the FPOA has received the highest score ever on a DRP inspection. In fact, we received a perfect score. This reflects both the physical condition of the

2026 Program Dates

Saturday Evening Programs (lecture start)

March	14, 21 (8 PM)	July	4, 11, 18
April	11, 18, 25	August	8, 15
May	9, 16, 23 (8:30 PM)	September	5, 19 (8 PM)
June	13, 20	October	3, 10, 17

Solar Programs (2-5pm)

March	21	July	18
April	18	August	15
May	6	September	5
June	20	October	3

Board Meetings (Zoom, 1pm)

January	10	July	11
February	14	August	8
March	14	September	(12)
April	11	October	10
May	9	November	14
June	13	December	No Meeting

Annual Meeting & SBQ September 12

Please check our web [Schedule](#) and [status](#) for updates before heading up.

observatory (Thanks Eric, Rick, Loren, etc.), and the quality of our outreach programs (Thanks Rob and everyone). Let us continue the good work.

Rob Hawley is in the process of installing a new type of finder on both Big Orange (the 16 inch dob) and the Challenger. The new finder is called a "[PiFinder](#)" It will allow us to find dim objects much more easily. At this time Rob has produced videos that describe how the PiFinder works and how to use the pi-finder. If you plan to use either Big Orange or the Challenger, I recommend that you review the videos in detail. Rob will also be providing on-the-job training. Now it will not take me 5 to 10 minutes to find M65 and M66.

As a final note, there may be a chance to see a bright comet in early April. Comet Kreutz, C/2026A1 is a sun grazer, and it may provide a magnificent tail early in the evening just after sunset. The best chance to see the comet is around April 7. I hope the weather cooperates.

PD

Operations

Rob Hawley, Eric Egland

2026 Challenger Use and Training

In the Winter 2025 Observer, I mentioned that I've taken over training for both the Challenger and the new PiFinder on Big Orange. Here are some of the changes that will be implemented this year.

As previously mentioned, Challenger Certification (required for independent use) will now be broken into two parts; Telescope Use (Use) and Building Open/Close.

"Use" certification is a traditional requirement that dates back to when Kevin Medlock was doing the training himself. It will normally be granted when the individual has been the principal Challenger operator during a public program. The purpose of "Use" training is to demonstrate that you can find objects with the Challenger and will proceed as follows:

- The first path is available for those users familiar with star hopping a Dobsonian telescope and who can use the optical tools. Since star hoppers can already find objects using the finders and telrads on the Challenger, no additional navigation training is required, but we *may* ask you to confirm you are able to star hop with the Challenger since using the Challenger is harder than a Dobsonian telescope.
 - Rob will grant exceptions to the "Use" training rule for those that have extensive previous knowledge of star hopping. Note the bar will be quite high. Those not meeting this high bar will be asked to find a couple of not too difficult objects. Note also that the "service" requirement below will still apply. These individuals will still require some training on Challenger specific use issues such as practicing a meridian flip without banging the telescope into the roof.

- There may be a *limited* number of opportunities to get “Use” certification on a non program night.
- Those who are not familiar with star hopping can choose to use the new electronic finder. A training video on using that on the Challenger is now available. Again you will be tasked with finding a couple of not too difficult objects to confirm you can use the tool and the telescope.

I have also developed a training rig that will allow a student to practice with a smaller telescope (an Orion Finder) before attempting to do the same with the harder to use Challenger. Note that the training rig is only available when the pi finder is not required on the Challenger.

I have grandfathered “Use” certification to everyone previously certified. Since only one operator can be the principal operator on any given night, it would be very time consuming to re-certify everyone. Those that have not recently used the Challenger should book time as an operator before attempting to book private time.

Building Open/Close training is no longer required to use the Challenger during a public program, but you will be paired with an experienced operator.

The Building Open/Close training will consist of most of the same material as previously presented in Challenger Training. This training will only be available to those members who have “Use”. I will be holding the first class before the public program on May 23rd and plan to schedule two additional sessions later in the year.

FPOA will be returning to our pre-COVID strict enforcement of service as a requirement to book private Challenger time. A member must have either operated an FPOA scope or helped by operating their own scope as a part of a public program to qualify.

RJH

2026 PiFinder Training Videos

Rob has been working on installation and training of new digital finders for our main program telescopes; Challenger and Big Orange (16”). He developed mounts and created a couple training videos for our volunteers and observers.



We hope the digital finders, in conjunction with general sky knowledge and our digital atlases (handheld and on the Mac mini), help us share a greater number of observable objects during 2026 programs and beyond.

Our new training video for use of the PiFinders on Challenger and Big Orange is now available on our website at <https://fpoa.net/pi-finder.html>.

ETE

The winter season of 2025-26 is challenging FPOA to recover from the December 25th windstorm damage and consider approaches to protect the observatory in years going forward.

As many of you may have heard, the winter storm also severely damaged the facilities at Lick Observatory with winds of 114 mph recorded at their site. FPOA experienced similar storm conditions with winds possibly exceeding 100 mph. The winds stripped 75% of the steel siding from the FPOA's observatory's west wall, tore fascia boards and siding off the observatory's south-wall, and blew the roof off the Parks haz mat shed (see Gallery).



FPOA quickly assembled a crew to recover materials from the wind storms, repair the damage, and reinstall the observatory's exterior siding, mitigating any further damage.

Eric and Ed walked the grounds of the observatory recovering and straightening salvageable siding panels for re-attachment. Follow-up work crews (Eric, Rob, Pat, Tom, and Rick) later joined in retrieving surplus siding materials that were (thankfully) warehoused in the Park Rangers' "Hazardous Materials Shed" and supplemented recovered materials during restoration of the observatory siding.

Eric Eglund led the restoration process, removing remaining observatory panels and planning re-installation of salvaged originals and replacements. During this process, the group uncovered some shortfalls in the original installation of the observatory siding. Unfortunately, the contractor used smooth, short nails to hammer in the galvanized panel brackets. These fasteners were unable to withstand the forces of 100+ mph winds and allowed the panels to "peel away" from the observatory.



Re-installing salvaged panels, along with surplus siding, was not a cake walk. Re-installing these panels required the crew to integrate with the remaining wall panels and insure that the re-installed full panels fit with the rest of the siding. When re-installing the panels, the crew utilized 1.25" Simpson Strong Tie screws to attach the panel brackets; increasing the holding force of these brackets. Through trial-and-error, and Eric's hands-on experience in these types of projects, the siding reinstall went quickly over a 3 - 4 day period. Bravo Eric!



Going forward, FPOA ought to consider the following questions.

First, the observatory has experienced at least two wind storms in recent decades with winds of 100+ mph. It is reasonable to expect that similar wind storms will occur in the next 10 years and FPOA should consider additional measures to proactively fortify the observatory.

Approaches to fortify the observatory for high wind conditions may include:

- Bolstering tie-down turnbuckles and hardware used to hold the roll-off roof in place
- Retrofit previously-installed exterior siding with additional or replacement hardware to prevent peeling during storms.

Second, FPOA is somewhat blind to the weather conditions it faces over the Winter. FPOA is considering a proposal for an internet-connected weather station enabling reading/logging of wind speed and other weather data at the observatory. This will also increase the accuracy of weather forecasts we send to our observers and use to post program status.

RM, ETE

Support

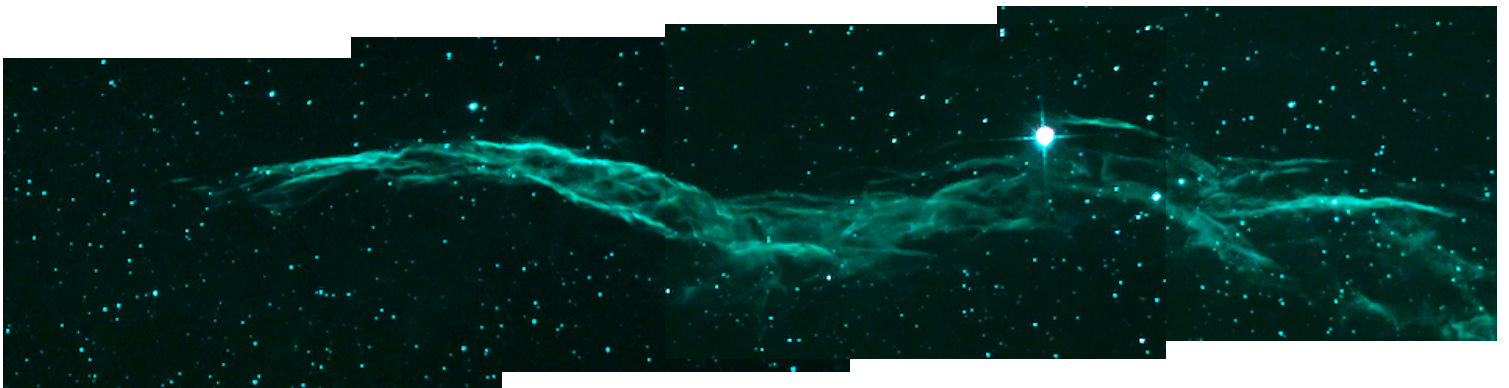
Thanks to those who renewed. FPOA receives most of its income from our memberships. Most annual members are now Observers. We still need your support. Contributions cover publications, phone, insurance, rent, etc.

Please consider volunteering, it's great fun and a service to our community. Please see the [back page](#) for details.

Membership Renewal

To join or renew, please select from the list of options on our [Membership page](#) and pay via PayPal or mail a check to:

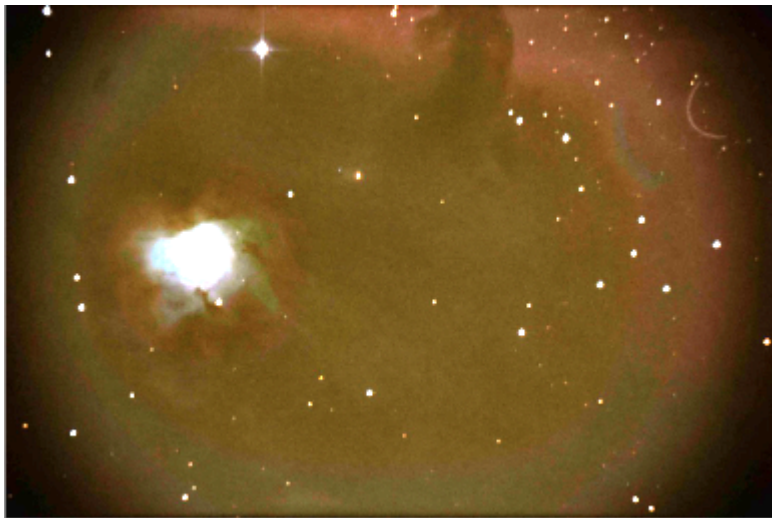
FPOA Membership
c/o Rob Hawley
1233 Hillcrest Dr.
San Jose, CA 95120



Western Veil Nebula, Caldwell 34/NGC 6960 through the 30", O-III filter, Eric Egland

Gallery

From top CW: SpaceX Falcon 9 Vandenberg rocket launch group from the peak at about 170 Az and 10° up; roof blown off the Parks hazmat shed Dec 25th by 100+ mph winds; empty toolbox blown 15' off the platform; a clear winter day, M101 - Pinwheel galaxy; first try at the Horsehead Nebula within 30" vignette - thought I missed it.





Toyon berries greet the winter sun

Fremont Peak Observatory Association

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Inquiries *info at fpoa.net*

Schedule *schedule at fpoa.net*

Membership *membership at fpoa.net*

Editor *editor at fpoa.net*

Treasurer *treasurer at fpoa.net*

Website: fpoa.net

Facebook: [fpoa.observatory](https://www.facebook.com/fpoa.observatory)

X (Twitter): [fpoa_info](https://twitter.com/fpoa_info)

Observatory: (831) 623-2465

Observing Reservations

Please send the following information
48 hours in advance to:

schedule at fpoa.net

- Member name
- Reservation date
- Estimated arrival time
- Duration of stay
- Number in party
- Vehicle description and license plate
- Specific observing site request (pad)

Reminder – 48-hour notice for Observer Access is non-negotiable

Please, No 'last minute' requests

We lease access to the FPOA area from the State. Our agreements with the State require we give 48 hours' notice for all visitors. Observer members agree to the 48-hour notice per the liability contract.

Officers and Directors 2026

President	Pat Donnelly
VP, Editor, Social M., Facilities	Eric Eglund
Treasurer, IT, Membership	Rob Hawley
Instruments, Schedule	Ron Dammann
Secretary	Tom Kellogg
Special Programs Coord.	Jeff Shapiro
	Chris Angelos
	Rick Mazzarella
	Tanveer Singh
Directors Emeritus	Kevin and Denni Medlock
	Loren Dynnesson

Dates and Delivery

Members, The Observer is now sent by email and posted on our website at [FPOA Observer online](http://www.fpoa.net). Please send email updates to *membership at fpoa.net*.

The *Fremont Peak Observer* publishes four times a year following Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. We welcome articles and photos from our members. Please email those to *editor at fpoa.net* by Feb 25th, May 25th, August 25th, and November 25th in plain text or Word format.

Public Program Volunteers

- Complete the updated [2023 liability waiver](#) and return to *membership at fpoa.net*.
- Also, please email name, vehicle, and the program date to *schedule at fpoa.net*.

