



The American Association of Variable Star Observers

May 2, 2023

Dear AAVSO Members,

It is with great pleasure that I write my first quarterly Director's Report which provides an overview of AAVSO's recent activities and accomplishments. In this inaugural issue, I'd like to highlight several items that cover Jan 1 - March 31, 2023, with a little bit of executive privilege to cover a few items that occurred slightly outside of that time period.

Farewells

As many of you know, long time AAVSO Staff Member, Sara Beck, retired from the AAVSO on January 31 after 33 years of service. Sara had many different responsibilities throughout her career in AAVSO including member and observer correspondence, data validation, revisions to our observing manuals, and creation of a variety of applications which we still use today. We congratulate Sara on a wonderful career and wish her the best in retirement.

It is also with sadness that we announce the departure of Lindsay Ward, our Communications Manager, who has decided to move on to a Market Operations Manager position at another nonprofit organization. Lindsay joined the AAVSO in 2019 as an Office Assistant and quickly rose up the ranks by demonstrating her outstanding skills, creativity, enthusiasm, and dedication. Her contributions to the AAVSO have been numerous and significant, including increasing our social media presence, bringing the AAVSO Annual Meeting online, and making our Ambassador Program successful. We want to thank Lindsay for her contributions to the AAVSO. We are confident that she will excel in her future endeavors and look forward to hearing about her continued success.

Our intention is to backfill these positions as quickly as possible. In December, the Board authorized the creation of a full-time software developer position to backfill Sara's position. We have already advertised and interviewed for this position and hope to fill it by the end of May. Lindsay's former role will be split into two separate part-time positions. One will focus on Marketing and Communications and the other on Volunteer Coordination. We hope to have both of these positions filled by the end of July.

Annual Campaign

As I'm sure all of your inboxes have noticed, the AAVSO Annual Campaign is well underway. This year we are attempting to raise \$110,000 to support efforts to improve our technical infrastructure, implement the recommendations of the Data Quality Taskforce, and find our niche

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in the automated sky survey era. Just a few days ago, an AAVSO Member offered a \$25,000 challenge grant that is valid through May 31. If you haven't already, please consider supporting the AAVSO by donating at <http://aavso.org/donate-now>.

Data Quality Taskforce

At the 2022 Annual Meeting I announced that I would create a Data Quality Taskforce (DQTF) to investigate real or perceived issues with the quality of our data. I am happy to report that the Taskforce has completed its work. They produced a series of 26 separate recommendations that generically fall into the following six categories (1) Establish metrics to measure and monitor the quality of the data, (2) implement quality checks at the time of submission, (3) provide feedback to observers after submission, (4) introduce new educational and knowledge building activities, (5) create new observing awards that value quality over quantity, and (6) create material to educate and inform professional astronomers about known issues with our data.

I would like to thank the following individuals for participating in the DQTF:

- Arne Henden
- Bert Pablo
- Brian Kloppenborg
- Ed Wiley
- Ken Menzies
- George Silvis
- Matt Craig
- Mark Munkacsy
- Tom Calderwood
- Gordon Myers

AAVSO in the Sky Survey Era

Another item I mentioned during the 2022 Annual Meeting was that AAVSO needed to find its niche in the sky survey era. To that end, I've worked with Rachel Freed and Russ Genet to assemble a two-day workshop at the upcoming summer American Astronomical Society (AAS) meeting in Albuquerque, NM on June 3-4. This program will bring together representatives from six sky surveys, three telescope farms, three telescope manufacturers, one space agency, and eight educational institutions to discuss how small telescopes can collaborate with big surveys. We will announce the conclusions of the workshop at this summer's Society of Astronomical Sciences (SAS) meeting along with a written summary to AAVSO members.



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A new collaboration

Next, I would like to announce a new collaboration between the AAVSO and Georgia State University's Center for High Angular Resolution Astronomy (CHARA) interferometric array. CHARA is an optical interferometer. It combines the light from six one-meter telescopes in real time to form a telescope with an effective diameter of 331 meters. With it, researchers can literally resolve the surfaces of stars, see novae expanding at day one, and study the physics of star formation. Go check out their [science highlights](#) for more information. CHARA is an ideal partner for the AAVSO as they are magnitude limited to $V \sim 12$ / $H \sim 9$ which is ideal for most backyard telescopes.

With this collaboration, I decided to try something new. Rather than asking professionals to come to us, I went to them. For the first time in our organization's history, professional astronomers can request AAVSO observations as part of a major observatory's proposal process. To encourage professional astronomers to check the box, I gave a presentation summarizing your observation capabilities at the 2023 CHARA Consortium meeting in Atlanta in March 2023.

The CHARA 2023B observing session begins this summer, so please keep an eye out for upcoming [Observing Campaigns](#). I think this is a really exciting opportunity and I know you'll make it successful.

Returning to variable star astronomy

On a more personal note, I've recently finished setting up a home observatory. I live in a condo with no usable land and a covered patio, so my equipment is significantly more modest than most of yours. I was able to negotiate with my HOA to leave a free-standing pier on my patio, but I have to set up and tear down my telescope nightly. If you are interested in reading more about my adventures with my observatory, please let me know.

Kind regards,

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