



**Presidents Message – December, 2011**

The Associated Press released an item this week about the recent happenings in the effort to develop commercial space travel. As you know, the Space Shuttle program has terminated, and the U.S. has to depend on the Russian Soyuz to get astronauts to and from the International Space Station. NASA will not have a human capable orbital vehicle for a few (perhaps many) more years. Therefore there are several private enterprises, like Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic, that are moving full speed ahead with low Earth orbit spacecraft.

The A.P. reports that Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen has joined forces with aerospace pioneer Burt Rutan to build a giant airplane which will carry a spaceship to a very high altitude, and then be inserted into low orbit. The project will be named "Stratolaunch". This is an ambitious plan which entails designing a super-sized plane with a wingspan of 380 feet, which will be larger than Howard Hughes Spruce Goose.

The enormous aircraft will fly to the upper edge of the atmosphere and launch a space capsule equipped with a booster rocket, which will then propel itself up into low Earth orbit. The capsule will be able to carry up to six astronauts to the space station, and be capable of putting satellites into orbit.

Paul Allen has been a staunch supporter of space related projects. He sponsored the Allen Array, which is the radio telescope facility in Northern California, in the Hat Creek Valley. The array was part of the SETI project, and has since been closed down. Allen also worked with Burt Rutan in 2004, when Rutan won the \$10 Million X-Prize for the first flight of a private spacecraft to reach space (but not orbit).

Two other tech industry tycoons, Elon Musk of PayPal, and Jeff Bezos of Amazon, are also getting involved in the "privatization" of space. Musk's "Space Exploration Technologies" plans to send its Dragon capsule to dock with the space station in February. Bezos is investing in his own rival private spaceship endeavor. It is clear that there are some exciting days ahead in the adventure of manned spaceflight.

*Mike Thomas*

**November, 2011**

**November 2011 Meeting Minutes**

- Mike Thomas reported on the lack of accuracy in the Media's coverage of Astronomy.
- Observatory Director Robert Collier announced the 'soon to be installed' file server.
- Those present participated in a 'members only' star party.

*WNAS Officers*

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**Evening program for the 7:00 PM, Tuesday, December 20th monthly membership meeting:**

**"State of the Art Astrophotography"  
Presented by John Dykes.**

This slide-show lecture, with an 'in the classroom' equipment demonstration, instructs the membership on the latest techniques for obtaining professional quality astrophotography. John will also present a gallery of his amazing photographs. This is a 'don't miss' event.

# Events Calendar

~ December 2011 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
*Total Lunar Eclipse; The eclipse will be visible throughout most of Europe, eastern Africa, Asia, Australia, the Pacific Ocean, and the North America				1	2 Moon 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr	3 Star Party
4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Star Party Full Moon *Lunar Eclipse
11	12	13 Geminid meteors	14 Geminid meteors	15	16	17 Star Party
18 Moon 3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr	19	20 <i>WNAS Meeting</i> 7pm JCDO	21 Winter Solstice 05:30 UTC	22	23	24 Star Party Dark Skies New Moon
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 Star Party

~ January 2012 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Moon 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr	2	3 Quadrantids meteor shower Look @ constellation Bootes	4 Quadrantids meteor shower Look @ constellation Bootes	5	6	7 Star Party
8	9 Full Moon	10	11	12	13	14 Star Party
15	16 Moon Last Qtr	17 <i>WNAS Meeting</i> 7pm JCDO	18	19	20	21 Dark Skies Star Party
22	23 New Moon	24	25	26	27	28 Dark Skies Star Party
29	30	31 Moon 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr	<b>Notes:</b>			