

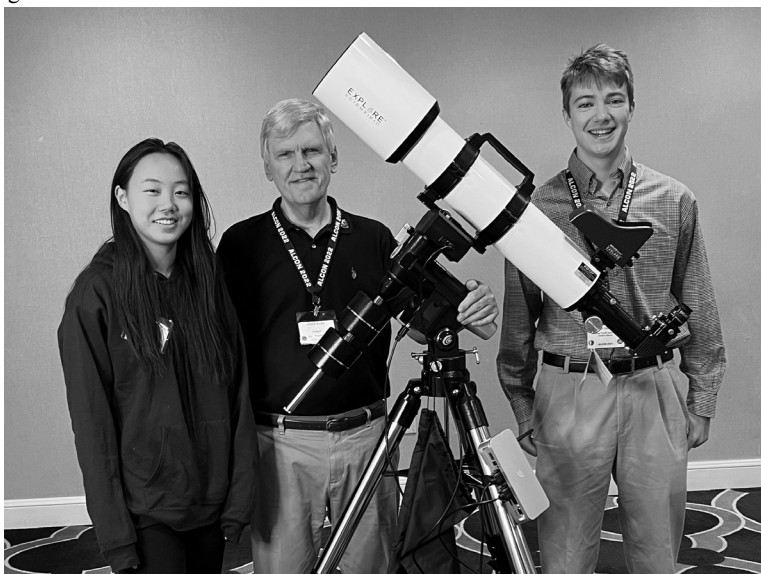
THE ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE AND YOU

By CHARLES E. ALLEN, ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE PRESIDENT

In 1946, Dr. Harlow Shapley, the Harvard astronomer who first determined our Sun's location in the outer reaches of the Milky Way, became the first president of the Astronomical League. Realizing the important role played by amateur astronomers in this field of science, Shapley had worked with amateur groups in the Midwest and in the New York area for nearly a decade to cobble together a national association of amateur astronomers.

Today, the League is the largest pure astronomy, and largest amateur astronomy, organization in the entire world. With 24 000 members, the League is home to more than 300 League member societies and is funded with minimal dues and a Trust Fund that benefits from generous bequests. But what's the League about, and what's in it for you?

I should start with our incredible Observing Program Division. Staffed by 5 national directors and 35 coordinators, the Division offers more than 67 rigorously observing regimens, each providing pins, certificates, and national recognition upon completion. Each regimen involves between 50 and 2400 observations, many with associated analytical, imaging, or sketching requirements. We also offer a tranche of master-level certifications for visual observers, binocular observers, imagers, and those engaged in public outreach. Pursuit of these programs has led me to my dark sky-site 72 miles from home for over 115 all-nighters in the last 5 years alone and has led me to observe more than 4000 discretely different objects in space—objects I might never have bothered to observe without the new directions offered by these programs. Our national directors change with the times too, providing program opportunities for those observing in cities and those using night vision aides, electronic telescopes, and even the naked eye alone. Some 5 600 different members have earned more than 16 000 certificates and pins in the programs.



NYAA co-winners, Kaitlyn Wang and León García, with Chuck Allen at ALCon '23

Our observing programs lead the dedicated observer through scores of observational or imaging challenges. These challenges, many of which are supported by published League observing manuals, involve the Messier Catalogue, the Caldwell Catalogue, the Arp Peculiar Galaxy Catalog, the Bennett Catalogue, the Herschel 400 Catalogue, double stars, variable stars (with AAVSO reporting), novae, asterisms, carbon stars, Solar System objects and events, the Sun in white and H-alpha light, eclipses, the Moon and lunar evolution, neighborhood stars, southern sky objects, planetary nebulae, bright and dark nebulae, globular and open clusters, asteroids and near-Earth objects, comets, meteors (with ALPO reporting), Jupiter and Mars observing, flat galaxies, Arp galaxies, galaxy clusters, local galaxy groups, and active galactic nuclei. Our programs go even further, however, reaching Dark Sky Advocacy, radio astronomy, spectroscopy, sketching, alternate constellations and lore, public outreach, beginner programs, children's programs, and Urban Observing programs for the city bound.

Our Observing Program Division also recognizes and promotes citizen science through the observation of variable galaxies, variable stars, earth orbiting satellites, Mars, meteors, novae, occultations, near-Earth objects, and spectroscopic targets. These observations are reported to NASA, AAVSO, ALPO, Satflare, AMS, and IOTA, and hence, make direct contributions to science.



Scott Harrington with *Apollo 17* astronaut, Harrison Schmitt, at ALCon '22

The League maintains robust award programs for young people that provide annual prizes of more than \$18,000 for research, service and outreach, imaging, and science journalism. Our National Young Astronomer Award (NYAA) program has been recognizing extraordinary astrophysical research by teens since 1993.

We also offer general award recognitions for major lifetime contributions to astronomy (the Astronomical League Award), exceptional lifetime observational work (the Leslie Peltier Award), web mastery, newsletter editing, imaging, and sketching.

Each year the League gives away up to 11 \$400 Library Telescopes to member societies, 1 in each of its 10 regions and 1 to a member-at-large, for placement in local libraries. This fabulous program helps clubs reach out to potential members, and especially young members, in their communities.

Every quarter, we publish a beautiful color newsmagazine, *Reflector*, that features member-contributed content including articles, images, significant club activities, and club-member accomplishments. Members completing observing programs are recognized there.

We conduct annual national conventions that, over the years, have been hosted by member societies in 29 different states. The 2025 convention will be an observing and imaging-oriented event at popular (and dark!!) Bryce Canyon National Park. In subsequent years, we will be in Cincinnati, Colorado Springs, and Northern Florida. At these meetings, you can rub elbows with famous professional astronomers, television personalities, and astronauts.

Our conventions feature talks, banquets, star-b-ques, award presentations, observing opportunities, local tours (e.g. Lick Observatory, LIGO, the VLA, the Linda Hall Library, and the Kennedy Space Center), and, most important of all, an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends for a lifetime.

Finally, we publish a host of observing manuals, Guides, and *Asto-Notes*, offer discounted club liability insurance, provide a League store, and offer a new League website with award databases and (soon) readily searchable society information.

What is truly remarkable about the League is that all these benefits to the hobby are fueled by the efforts of volunteers at a cost that, for members of League societies, can be as low as \$6 per year—about the cost of two cups of java at a local coffee shop. At this slight cost, members provide their hobby with a national presence that is replete with opportunities for amateurs of every ilk—observers, imagers, teachers, writers, researchers, observers, editors, webmasters, organizers, leaders, and those who enjoy meeting new people. We welcome new members from around the world, so please join us and help us grow even more!

