

01 - The Stars Above Macarthur - September 2012

The Stars Above Macarthur

with Robert Bee

The 'Heavens Above' column in the Macarthur Chronicle ended in December 2011. I wish to thank the editor and staff at the Chronicle for 13 good years of 'Heavens Above'.

It has now been reborn as 'The Stars Above Macarthur' in the Campbelltown Advertiser, commencing in August 2012 with the column below..

As a passionate amateur astronomer for the past 50 years, and a member of the Macarthur Astronomical Society since it began in 1996, I realise that we are currently living in an era of special excitement about and opportunities for astronomy.

'Excitement' because during the life of this generation there have been so many discoveries that have changed the course of astronomy. There's been the surprise discovery of Dark Energy that is causing our expanding universe to accelerate rather than slow down as had been the theory of the day. This discovery resulted in Australian Brian Schmidt (along with two others) winning the Nobel Prize for Physics. Brian will be speaking at the Macarthur Astronomical Forum on this discovery in 2013. There has also been the explosion of discoveries of extra-solar planets around other stars – over 700 to date and counting – when none had been known before 1995. And that's just a couple of the recent advances in astronomical knowledge. The potential for even more amazing discoveries to be made is very real.

'Opportunities' because never at any time in the past 400 years of modern astronomy have the professional astronomers had access to such a huge array of giant telescopes, not to mention all the space telescopes in the optical, infrared, ultraviolet and X-ray wavelengths. Closer to home, amateur astronomers now have available a wide range of large and affordable telescopes to both enjoy the hobby and also contribute to science.

And there is so much for you to enjoy, with naked eye, binoculars or telescope, just from your backyard. It's my aim with this monthly column to help you share the enjoyment of the magic of the night sky. What constellations, planetary conjunctions or stars of special interest are up there to see each month?

Come and join me as we explore the Stars Above Macarthur.