

# MEMBERSPOTLIGHT



## THE GREATEST STARS OF LAS VEGAS CAN'T BE SEEN ON THE STRIP!

### KEITH CACERES

President, Las Vegas Astronomical Society



*Former LVAS President Gary Keilman doing the kickoff presentation for a summer star party on Mt. Charleston. Spring Mountains Visitor Gateway. Photo by Keith Caceres*

The Las Vegas Astronomical Society (LVAS) is an organization of amateur astronomers, formed to promote amateur astronomy in Southern Nevada. The society was established in July 1980, and is organized as a Nevada non-profit corporation and federal 501(c)(3) educational public charity, operating in association with the College of Southern Nevada Planetarium. Our mission is to share our love and enjoyment of the night sky and promote astronomy & science education. We also work to educate the public about light pollution and its negative effects on astronomical observation.

We hold regularly scheduled monthly meetings at the CSN Planetarium on the first Thursday of every month at 7:30 pm.\* These meetings are open to the general public, and usually feature a presentation related to astronomy in general, astrophysics, space exploration, or amateur astronomy observation tools and techniques. Attendees are encouraged to ask questions, seek advice on telescope purchases, as well as get pointers from group members about the use of their telescope in the parking lot after meetings.

*Background Image: Cathedral Gorge State Park  
by Keith Caceres*

LVAS also organizes various types of astronomical observation sessions ("star parties"). We endeavor to make most of our events open to the public. We hold monthly public star parties (except December) at various federal and state parks throughout the Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperative (BRDSC), working with many federal land agencies. LVAS monthly events are held at Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center, Spring Mountain Ranch State Park, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and the Spring Mountains Visitor Gateway on Mount Charleston, as well as special events at the CSN Planetarium.\*

We partner with area schools and civic organizations to offer private star parties for school science and astronomy nights, Girl Scout & Boy Scout troops, service organizations, and other organizations with an interest in astronomy. We also assist and support the efforts of other community groups with similar educational and astronomical activities like the BRDSC. In addition, we organize four yearly two-night "special events" at Basin and Range Dark Sky Cooperative dark sky sites, such as Death Valley National Park and Cathedral Gorge State Park in rural Nevada. Many guests at these events camp overnight and enjoy some of the best night skies in the lower 48!



The astronomical society also maintains an observatory on Mt. Potosi, in partnership with the Boy Scouts of America. The observatory was formed after the society received a generous donation of an Officina Stellare 360 mm (14 inch) Ritchey Chretien telescope, which uses the same optical design as professional-grade telescopes like the Hubble Space Telescope and the Keck Observatory's twin 10 meter telescopes.

The Boy Scouts cleared a hill within their Mt. Potosi summer camp for the construction of our observatory. Many companies came together to donate paving, construction, and equipment. Today the observatory has a control room, three telescope domes, and ten concrete telescope pads, where members can set up their telescopes for the night. All structures and pads have electrical power and a WiFi network powered by microwave Internet access. There is also a donated weather station (connected to Weather Underground) and an all-sky camera so observing conditions can be accessed before making the trip up the mountain.

Membership in the astronomical society is open to the general public, including people of all skill levels, from the beginner with no equipment to the advanced observer, professional scientist, or professor. (Teachers especially welcome!)

*\*Currently all in person meetings and events are suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The club is working towards moving as many of these events to an online platform as possible.*



*Former LVAS President Rob Lambert viewing the transit of Mercury. Photo by Keith Caceres*



*Girl Scout event with solar observing. Photo by Keith Caceres*



*LVAS Observatory on Mt. Potosi. Photo by Keith Caceres*

## LEARN MORE

LVAS Website [lvastronomy.com](http://lvastronomy.com)

Death Valley Winter Star Party Photo Gallery [lvastronomy.com/index.php/events/death-valley-star-party-report](http://lvastronomy.com/index.php/events/death-valley-star-party-report)

CSN Planetarium [csn.edu/planetarium](http://csn.edu/planetarium)

Death Valley National Park [nps.gov/deva](http://nps.gov/deva)

Cathedral Gorge State Park [parks.nv.gov/parks/cathedral-gorge](http://parks.nv.gov/parks/cathedral-gorge)