



# Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society

Amateur Astronomy News and Views  
In Southwestern Virginia



Volume 43—Number 2

February 2026

## *RVAS January Meeting Summary*

### Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope

Due to weather conditions, this month's meeting (January 26) was Zoom only. The meet and greet was from 7 to 7:28pm.

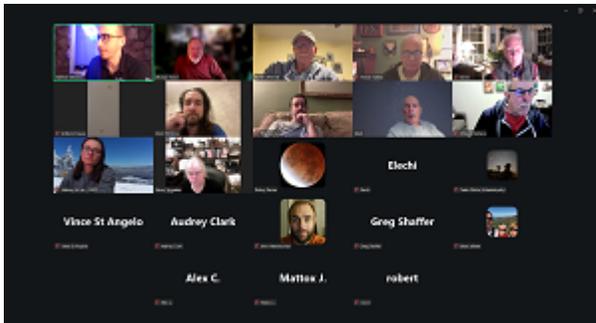
You can view this month's Zoom recording by clicking this [link](#). The passcode to view the video is: H+VE%Lp7

The meet and greet was from 7 to 7:28pm. Michael then showed the agenda

#### Agenda (7:00) January 26, 2026 Meeting

- 7:00 Agenda. Gathering via ZOOM only
- 7:01 Member welcome, and announcements.
- 7:30 Feature Presentation by Nathan Tehrani:  
**Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope**  
(Coming to a Lagrange Point near you)
- 8:20 What's Up – Dr. John Wenskovich
- 8:40 Club astro-photos

At least 24 members joined online.



Under member announcements, Michael stated that Bill Krause's wife Judy recently passed away. Our club extends our condolences to Bill.

One of our topics was discussion about the Roanoke Science Museum moving from its current location. Mark stated that Center in the Square wants the museum's space back. The museum has found a potential new building with more space. Vince suggested the transportation museum would be an ideal location. Noah expressed concern about losing science communication resources. Mark clarified they're not closing permanently, just relocating. Michael mentioned the aviary on the top floor was a cool feature. Mark stated that the planetarium will be preserved and moved to the new location, and will likely have better parking and more space.

Next month's speaker is **Dr. Caitlin Ahrens**, who will discuss [cryovolcanoes](#) on Feb 16, 2026.

Michael then introduced **Nathan Tehrani** (NASA Goddard) who presented on the **Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope**, highlighting its capabilities for wide-field imaging and coronagraphy.



**Nathan** gave a history of astronomical sensing in space, including OAO, Hubble, Spitzer, WISE, and others. Nathan also gave a shout-out to this mission's namesake, Nancy Grace Roman, shown below:



The mission is a combination of

- Dark Matter Surveys
- Supernova Surveys
- Direct Exoplanet imaging

The telescope uses one of the two 2.4-meter mirrors donated by the NRO (National Reconnaissance Office) in 2012.



The telescope has two main instruments:

- the Wide Field Instrument (WFI) (shorter FOV than HST)
- a coronagraph

The WFI has 18 detectors covering a field of view 100 times larger than Hubble's. The telescope will primarily take quick 5-minute exposures rather than long exposures like Hubble

The coronagraph will demonstrate technology to directly image exoplanets.

**Michael:** Asked if coronagraph's optical bench is designed to (massively) increase the focal ratio, since the main mirror is a short FL. **Nathan** explained that yes, the coronagraph is much longer focal ratio.

**Noah:** Asked about the spacecraft rotation technique used to distinguish optical artifacts from actual planets. **Nathan** explained that the rotation technique is used to see if any pattern seen is an artifact from the speckle pattern of the star being nulled out, versus a real planet detection.

Nathan described the star trackers and the gyroscopes, given 20 milli-arcsec pointing stability requirement. This is made more difficult when imaging in spectral mode.

He shared many images of the spacecraft being assembled and tested in Building 10 at GSFC. This image shows a selfie Nathan (left) took of he and teammates in front of the spacecraft:



The telescope is currently undergoing final testing and is scheduled to ship to Florida in July/August 2026, with launch planned for as early as September 2026 or as late as May 2027. The telescope will be positioned at the L2 Lagrange point

### **What's Up January 26, 2026 through February 16, 2026**

Our meeting then switched to **Dr. John Wenskovitch**, who gave his usual excellent presentation on objects of interest between now and the next meeting. Celestial events include the moon passing near M45 on Jan 27. On Feb 1 the moon gets close to M44 (Beehive), and then Feb 2 the moon occults Regulus in Leo. (8:53pm – 9:40pm). John discussed the Astronomical League Open Cluster Observing program (Observe 100 or Observer 125). M44 is our Monthly Deep Sky Object, and interestingly, one of Galileo's first non-lunar/planetary targets.



### **Member Astro-Photos**

Michael cycled through recent Member Astrophotography, displayed later in the newsletter.

# What's Up? Highlights

February 1 to 28, 2026

## This Month:

After several months of the sky being dominated by the giant planets, our inner solar system friends begin to make an appearance in February. Though they're still lost in the twilight at the beginning of the month, Mercury doesn't set until 7:17pm on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and Venus lasts in the sky until 7:06pm on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Mars will still be lost in the twilight for another month. With its recent opposition, Jupiter still persists throughout the night, not setting until 6:05am as the month begins and 4:07am as the month ends. Uranus still lingers into the morning sky near the Pleiades, but we lose Saturn and Neptune earlier and earlier, starting the month with sunset times near 9:30pm but only staying above the horizon until 7:50pm as the month ends. In other solar system news, the Moon opens the month with an exciting occultation of Regulus in Leo, for Roanoke beginning at 8:53pm and ending at 9:40pm. It also has its typical conjunctions with the planets throughout the month, including a very close approach to Mercury on the 18<sup>th</sup> and forming a rectangle with Jupiter, Castor, and Pollux on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The winter constellations are rising high in the evening sky, giving you plenty of opportunities to gaze towards the outer reaches of the Milky Way, with plenty of open clusters and galaxies to choose from. The spring constellations make up the majority of the morning sky throughout the month, providing excellent opportunities to star-hop through the superclusters in Virgo and Coma Berenices!

## Celestial Events:

- February 1: Moon approaches M44
- February 2: Moon occults Regulus (8:53pm-9:40pm)
- February 18: Moon/Mercury conjunction
- February 19: Moon/Saturn conjunction
- February 23: Moon approaches M45
- February 26: Moon joins Jupiter and Gemini
- February 27: Opposition of asteroid (7) Iris

## Sunset and Twilight:

- Sunset ranges from 5:43pm (1<sup>st</sup>) to 6:12pm (28<sup>th</sup>)
- Evening twilight ends from 7:12pm (1<sup>st</sup>) to 7:39pm (28<sup>th</sup>)

## Lunar Phases and Apsides:

- Full Moon: February 1, 5:10pm
- Last Quarter: February 9, 7:44am
- Apogee: February 10, 11:51am (251,392 miles)
- New Moon: February 17, 7:03am
- First Quarter: February 24, 7:28am
- Perigee: February 24, 6:03pm (229,990 miles)

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society is a membership organization of amateur astronomers dedicated to the pursuit of observational and photographic astronomical activities. **Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Monday of each month. We meet at the VWCC STEM building ST314. Directions are below. Meetings are open to the public.** Observing sessions may be held, weather and sky conditions permitting, at a dark-sky site. For information regarding joining RVAS, including annual dues, [click here](#). Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS or its editor.

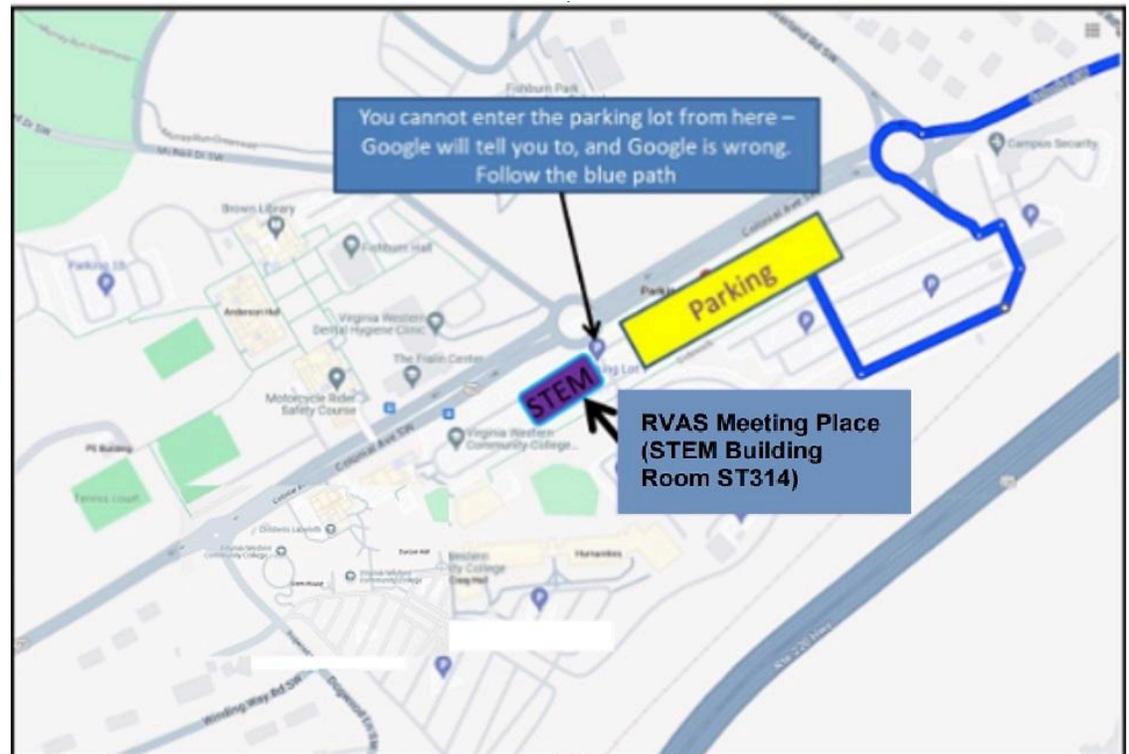
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William Krause, Vice President ([vicepresident@rvasclub.org](mailto:vicepresident@rvasclub.org))  
Erin Elliott, Secretary ([secretary@rvasclub.org](mailto:secretary@rvasclub.org))  
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Nancy Vogelaar, Officer at Large #1 ([officeratlarge1@rvasclub.org](mailto:officeratlarge1@rvasclub.org))  
Caleb White, Officer at Large #2 ([officeratlarge2@rvasclub.org](mailto:officeratlarge2@rvasclub.org))  
Michael Hutkin, Past President ([pastpresident@rvasclub.org](mailto:pastpresident@rvasclub.org))  
Ed Dixon, Newsletter Editor ([newsletter@rvasclub.org](mailto:newsletter@rvasclub.org))  
Ed Dixon, Webmaster ([webmaster@rvasclub.org](mailto:webmaster@rvasclub.org))

## Directions to RVAS Meeting Location

Virginia Western Community College STEM Building, Room ST314  
3094 Colonial Ave SW, Roanoke, VA 24015

VWCC is located in the southwestern area of the City of Roanoke. The STEM Building is accessed via the roundabout at Overland Drive and Colonial Avenue, near Campus Security at the top right of the map. The STEM Building is at the opposite end of the Colonial parking lot from Campus Security. Follow the darker blue path from the roundabout and park anywhere in the lot.



**Note:** Google provides incorrect guidance to access the parking lot from the roundabout at McNeill Drive. That roundabout **does not** provide an entrance to the parking lot.

**January 2026**

*Ctrl- Click on the picture see the source file and additional information*

**Mike Barbara Hutkin**



**Casey Johnson**



**William Krause**



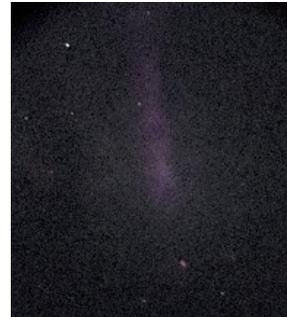
**David Thomas**



**Noah Winslow**



**Tara Wu**



**Tara Wu**



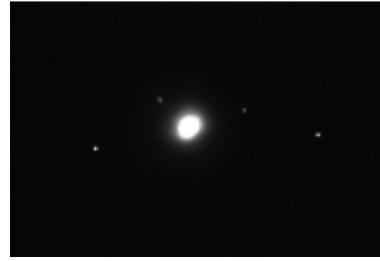
**Tara Wu**



**Ed Dixon**



**Ed Dixon**



**David Thomas**



**David Thomas**



**Hetzal Hartley**



**Hetzal Hartley**



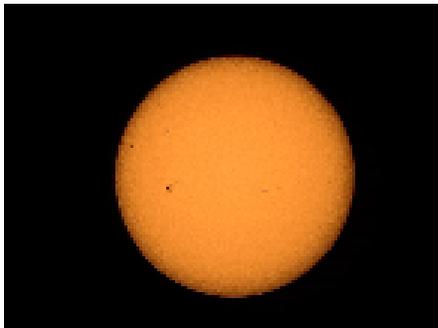
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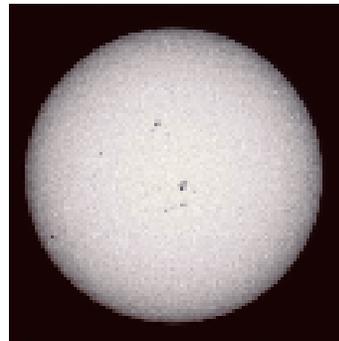
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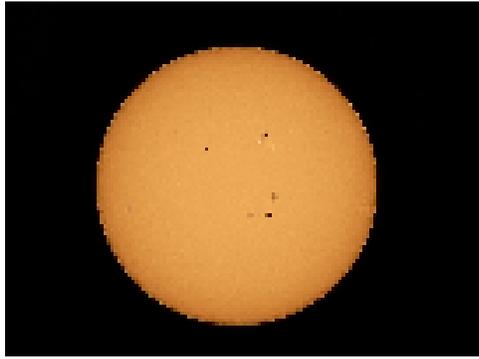
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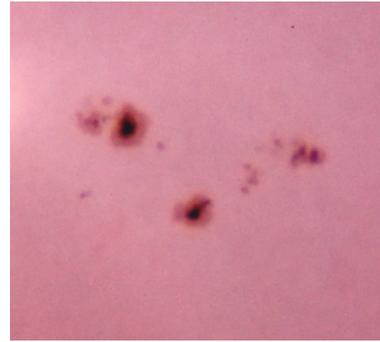
**Mike Barbara Hutkin**



**David Thomas**



**Hetzal Hartley**



**Noah Winslow**



**Greg Shaffer**



**Noah Winslow**



**Noah Winslow**



**Noah Winslow**



**Vincent ST. ANgelo**



## Ben Hartman

