



West Valley Astronomy Club

Monthly Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2026

Meeting: Beardsley Recreation Center - 12755 W Beardsley Rd, Sun City West, AZ 85375 – Agave Room #4

Board Members and Volunteers Present: Bob Randle (President), Paul Bleikamp (Vice President), Bob Colvert (Treasurer), John Hiatt (Program Director & Library Telescope Coordinator), Larry Matney (Outreach Director), Josh Burtrom (Star Party Coordinator), Bud and Betsy Johnson (Secretary), & members & visitors **(Total Present: 52)**.

1 - Opening Remarks: This meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Bob Randle. He said that his wife Janie had cataract surgery this morning, & will keep his phone on sound. All good wishes for a swift and sure recovery! The original speaker for tonight became ill and couldn't give his presentation; Todd Gonzales graciously stepped in to do a presentation at the last minute.

2 – Presentation: John Hiatt introduced Todd Gonzales, Director of Public Programs at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff. He's been with Lowell's education team since 2010. He taught science in Arizona public schools before joining Lowell. He personally took us on a tour of the new Astronomy Discovery Center (ADC). It is open every day except Tuesday. In his tour, he showed some glow-in-the-dark “aliens” greeting visitors in the front. There is a new Planet X Cafe, run by a local restaurant. In the Visitor Center is a gift shop, TV screens to show the scheduled events for the day. The Atrium has a display hanging from the ceiling of atoms, representing all things on Earth are made of atoms. He then took us on to the “Curiosity Zone”, for children; rocket launching, tactile sets for magnetic fields, infrared study, plasma, light prisms, gravity, spin table, etc. Next to that is a quiet room for nursing moms. The Stardust Lodge is for older children and families, using the five senses to understand the world. They can design their own space craft, find out how to detect extra planets, and use a microscope. Last September, Lowell commissioned paintings sharing other cultures' cosmos depictions, including the Hopi and the Navajo people of this area. Todd then went to the theater, which has a high-resolution screen and is 100 feet across and 25 feet high, with 173 seats. On to the next level, the Event Hall; in the Great Planetary Hall are giant pictures of each planet—Pluto, too. On to the roof; outside is the Dark Sky Terrace and a lighted path to the Dark Sky Planetarium. It's cold, but the 155 seats are heated. Todd said there will be a celebration of the discovery of Pluto on February 13 – 16 with speakers and activities. Check the online site for the schedule. Fees are \$35.00 for all-day visits to Lowell Observatory, plus \$5.00 extra for the Dark Sky night activities. Discounts are offered for group tours.

3 – Other Business: Bob Randle said to tell him if you'd like to sign up for a field trip to Lowell, so he can get a head count for Lana Slinkard, Field Trip Coordinator. The annual Star Party at Alamo State Park is a “go” for November 7th. Also, check out the Outreach calendar on the WVAC site.

4 – Door Prizes: None tonight. **50-50 Prizes:** There were three prizes tonight.

5 - Future Meetings: The next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 3, at 7 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10. Minutes submitted by Bud and Betsy Johnson, via email, **February 3, 2026.**

Minutes approved by: _____ Date _____

Bob Randle (WVAC President)