

Kingsville Record welcomes Stargazer Paul Derrick, who will keep readers informed about the universe

Pluto's fall to a dwarf planet

(To readers of The Kingsville Record and Bishop News: Welcome to Stargazer, an every-other-week column for all who find beauty and wonder in the night sky. Hoping you'll find Stargazer informative and entertaining, I welcome your comments, questions and ideas for column topics, and look forward to hearing from you. —Paul Derrick)



PAUL DERRICK
...Stargazer

International Astronomical Union, in a highly publicized and controversial decision, redefined "planet," and Pluto was reclassified as a dwarf planet.

It is now seen as one of the largest objects in the Kuiper belt, a swarming cluster of small icy objects orbiting the Sun beyond Neptune -- similar to asteroid belt, the swarming cluster of small rocky objects orbiting between Mars and Jupiter.

In July 2015 New Horizons will fly past Pluto and its three moons making them the most remote objects to be studied up-close.

It won't land but after zooming within 6,000 miles of Pluto, it should return images to dazzle our imagination and enough data to keep scientists busy for years.

If funding is available, New Horizons will continue its exploratory journey with fly-by visits to one or more other more distant Kuiper Belt objects between 2016 and 2020.

To read more about the New Horizons mission, visit www.pluto.jhuapl.edu.

Sky Calendar

• Thursday, Feb. 11: Morning: The crescent Moon is to the upper right of Mercury very low in the east

southeast at dawn, and to the planet's lower left the next morning.

• Saturday, Feb. 13: The Moon is new.

• Sunday, Feb. 14: Very early evening: Jupiter is four moonwidths above brighter Venus with an ever-so-thin crescent Moon to their left near the west southwestern horizon; they are visible soon after sunset and set soon thereafter; binoculars will help.

• Tuesday, Feb. 16: Early evening: Jupiter is one moonwidth to the right of brighter Venus very low in the west southwest just after sunset.

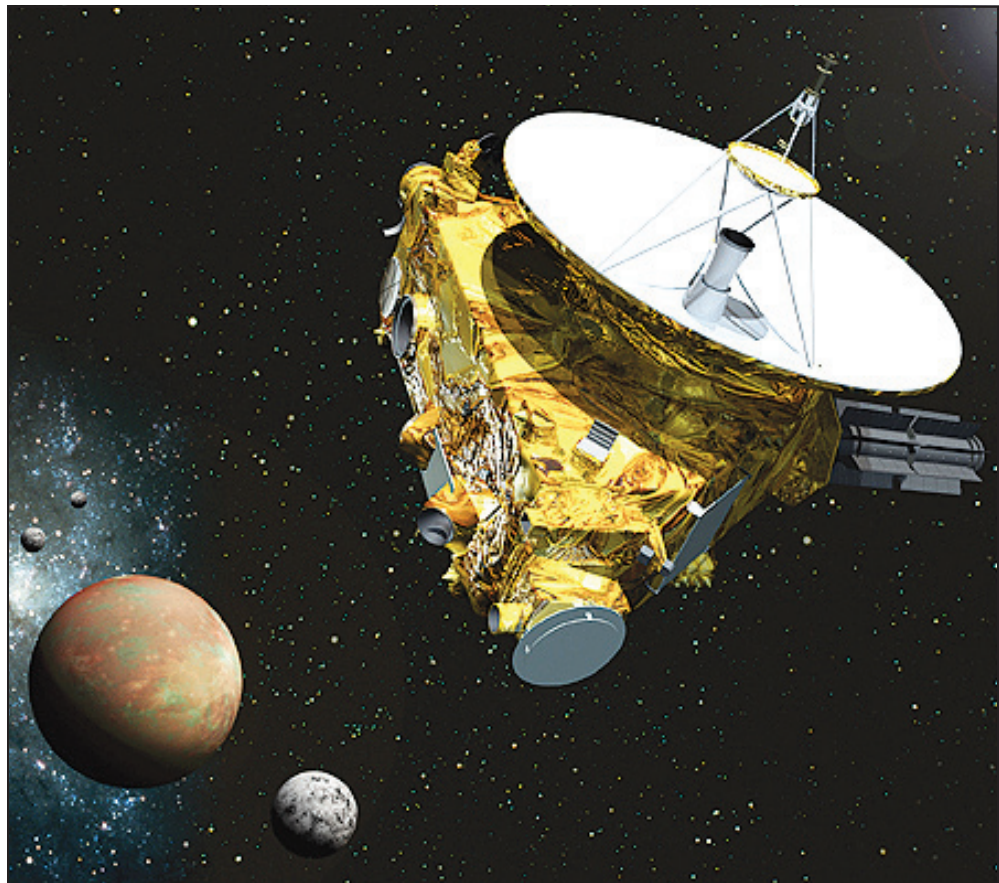
• Sunday, Feb. 21: The Moon is at 1st quarter.

• Thursday, Feb. 25: Evening and all night: Mars is to the left of the bright gibbous Moon; the faint Beehive Cluster is below them but will require binoculars to see.

• **Naked-eye Planets** – Evening: As twilight ends, Jupiter is setting in the west as Venus begins its stint as the "evening star," Mars is still prominent in the east. Morning: At dawn Mercury is very low in the southeast, Saturn higher is in the southwest, and Mars is setting in the west northwest.

• **Astro Milestones** – Feb. 15 is the 446th birthday of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). Feb. 19 is the 537th birthday of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543).

(Stargazer appears every other week. Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco. Contact him at 918 N. 30th, Waco, 76707, (254) 753-6920 or paulderrickwaco@aol.com. See the Stargazer Web site at stargazerpaul.com.)



Artist's concept of the New Horizons spacecraft as it approaches Pluto and its three moons in summer 2015. (Image provided by NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute)

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