



# The PROBIAN ~ February 2015 Edition

~ Editors: Max Wood & Colin Stephenson / Photos: Ernie Trischuk ~



**THE PROBUS CLUB OF PERTH**  
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Probuss meets the first  
Wednesday of each month,  
Sept. to June.

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## Apropos ....

Looking up at the sky on a sunny day we see a blue dome of atmosphere that stretches from horizon to horizon. If the sky remains clear after sundown, that blue dome is transformed into a transparent lens through which we can observe the moon and our glorious array of visible stars and planets. Without that atmosphere, life as we know it on this planet would be impossible. It provides the air we breathe, the clouds that distribute rain and snow, filters out deadly UV radiation generated by the sun and insulates us from the unbearable -270 degree temperatures of space that surrounds us. It also blankets us from the solar wind as we are propelled around the sun at the mind numbing rate of 107,000 kilometres per hour. Yet our atmosphere is delicate and, proportional to the size of the earth, unimaginably thin. It is only 96 kilometres thick (less than the distance from here to downtown Ottawa) while the earth has a diameter of 12,742 kilometres (about the distance from here to Johannesburg, South Africa).

Nonetheless, we tend to take this vital resource for granted. We still let certain industries spew waste from tall smokestacks and oil companies flare natural gas at their oil wells. But industry is only part of the problem. Every one of us contributes in our own small way to the toxic load that deteriorates our atmosphere, often without awareness. Since every little bit helps, why not try to car pool whenever we can; avoid food and beverage vendors who use disposable containers; avoid over-packaged goods of all kinds; cook from scratch instead of using prepackaged food; walk, cross-country ski, snowshoe, bike and leave the car at home; try composting if your municipality does not have a composting program. These are only a few of many ways in which we might change habits to minimize landfill and other contributors to air pollution. Please think about it.

*(Apropos reflects the views of the Editors but not necessarily those of the Club.)*

## Terence Dickinson's "Tour of the Universe"



Snow fell steadily and greasy roads dampened traffic but determination prevailed and a large crowd turned out to hear a fascinating presentation by the esteemed Terence Dickinson on February 4.

Terence was born in Toronto in 1943 and became interested in astronomy at the age of 5 when one evening from the front lawn of his family home he observed a brilliant meteor streak across the sky. He attended teacher's college and obtained a teacher's degree but he never taught. His professional career began in 1967 as a staff astronomer and instructor at the McLaughlin Planetarium of the Royal Ontario Museum. During the 1970s he was staff astronomer at the Strassenburgh Planetarium at the Rochester Science Center in Rochester, New York. Following that he served as editor of Astronomy magazine based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1976 he returned to Canada to accept a position as publications editor at the Ontario Science Centre in

Toronto. Since then he has devoted full time to astronomy writing, editing and broadcasting. From 1981-2004 he wrote a weekly astronomy and space exploration column for the Toronto Star. He is currently editor of SkyNews which he founded in 1995, Canada's national astronomy magazine now celebrating 20 years of publication.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## Terence Dickinson.....continued from p.1

Terence is the author of 15 astronomy books, including *NightWatch*, one of the bestselling star gazing guides in the world. He was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1995, Canada's highest civilian achievement award, and received an honorary doctorate from Trent University for his contributions to public understanding of astronomy. To honour him in 1994, the International Astronomical Union officially assigned the name of "Dickinson" to one of the asteroids in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. In addition to his books and other writings, Mr. Dickinson was the author of most of the astronomy questions for the Trivial Pursuit board game. He has also been a regular guest expert on CBC radio and television and the Canadian Discovery Channel. In 1998 the motion picture rights for his book *Extraterrestrials: A Field Guide to Earthlings* was purchased by Stephen Spielberg, although Spielberg ultimately decided to use H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* for his big-budget aliens-invade-earth movie. Since 1976 Terence and his wife Susan have lived under the dark night skies near Yarker, Ontario.

Although Mr. Dickinson's presentation was titled a "Tour of the Universe", he made it abundantly clear that a "tour" of the universe in any physical sense is thoroughly impossible, not only because our physical needs can only be met by our fragile and unique (in terms of our solar system) environment here on earth, but because of the unimaginable vastness of the universe as we know it. Even our solar system is so vast that its scale can only be imagined by way of analogy. To illustrate the size of our solar system, Terence used a yellow golf ball and a ball point pen. The yellow golf ball represented our Sun and the "ball" of the ball-point pen represented the Earth, to demonstrate the actual scale of the Earth in relation to the Sun. With the Sun held gingerly by someone in the front row of the hall, the relative distance to the Earth was near the back of the seating area.



*Bud Van Alstine holding the "sun" aloft*

He then went on to describe the position of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and sub-planet Neptune, now demoted to a Kyper Belt Object. The imaginary orbit of Neptune was described to be several blocks beyond the Legion Hall. At the same scale, the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, actually a star system consisting of Proxima Centauri, Alpha Centauri A and Alpha Centauri B, was in Winnipeg in Manitoba!

Terence explained that the Alpha Centauri star system is 4.35 light years away from Earth. To travel there using today's space travel technology would take 30,000 years. Certainly not an option for life as we know it. He further explained that Star Trek "warp speed" was pure fiction. Even a round trip to our nearest neighbor Mars, which would take a minimum of three years, has been discussed for 30 years but is still nowhere on the horizon.

We see about 2,000 stars on a clear night. There are at least 2 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy. To illustrate that by analogy, Terence asked us to imagine a railway hopper car full of sand. Each grain of sand represents 1 star, 99% of which are larger and brighter than our Sun. One thimble full of that sand represents the stars we can see on a clear night. The Milky Way is 100,000 light years across. In other words it takes light 100,000 years to travel from one side of the Milky Way to the other. To illustrate how many galaxies there are in the known universe, Terence asked us to imagine a train of hopper cars passing. Each hopper car is filled with at least 2 billion grains of sand, so it represents one galaxy. That train passes us at one car per second, 24 hours a day for 3 years. That means there are  $60 \times 60 \times 24 \times 3 \times 365$  (about 216 billion) galaxies in the known universe, each of which contains billions of stars. To further illustrate, Terence said that if we were to visit one star per second, it would take more time than has ever existed (13.8 billion years) to visit all of the stars in the known universe.

After analogizing about the size of the universe as we know it, Terence emphasized that Earth and its environment is absolutely essential to support our life. We cannot leave the protective environment of earth without surrounding ourselves with a facsimile of our environment here. To enter space without it would mean instant death.

He concluded his presentation with a few photographs from his collection, which like most things in space would no doubt take years and years to review. Most interesting was the photograph of Buzz Aldrin, taken by Neil Armstrong, on the Moon and the first hand recollection of Buzz passed on to Terence about their moon landing and how they were within seconds of running out of fuel for the rockets that cushioned their landing. Terence also recounted how he observed the moon landing from the Strasenburgh Planetarium where he could see the American spacecraft approach the Moon and the 4th stage rocket on the Moon.

(Continued on Page 3)

## Terence Dickinson.....continued from p.2

He also showed photographs of the Hubble space telescope, which has been refurbished many times since its launch on April 24, 1990, and continues to give us our best images of the visible universe. Unfortunately, time for this interesting presentation expired before further exploration of the unimaginably vast universe could be accomplished. We hope that Mr. Dickinson will return for a second chapter in his tour of the universe in the very near future.



## Quote for the Month

“And in that moment, I was hit with the realization that this delicate layer of atmosphere is all that protects every living thing on Earth from perishing in the harshness of space.”

— Ron Garan, NASA Astronaut, *The Orbital Perspective: Lessons in Seeing the Big Picture from a Journey of 71 Million Miles*

## Special Future Events



- **April 9** – Dinner / Theatre event – [Salvage Shop](#) at the Studio Theatre. Dinner at 5:30pm at the Stone Cellar, menu to include Rack of Lamb, AAA Filet, Chicken Torpedo and Fresh Fish. The play starts at 8pm and tickets are \$18. Please reserve at March or April meetings. ([Details](#))
- **May 12** – Spring Fling 2015 - Grenville Municipal Centre in Kemptonville – sponsored by the Probus Club of North Grenville – tickets \$38 and registration by April 3<sup>rd</sup> – [details](#).
- **May 27** – Gananoque Playhouse to see “[CLOSER THAN EVER](#)” which is an award-winning “how-to” manual for the middle aged – told entirely through song! – more details to follow.

## Personal Profile ~ Gail Read

Gail Read captivated members with a vigorous and flawlessly delivered summary of her interesting life and career. Gail, the eldest of two girls, was born in the Alta Vista suburbs of Ottawa, which was then still mostly farm land. Having loving, hard working parents, Gail grew up with an appreciation of hard work and the value of education. She also had the good fortune of spending every summer at the family cottage on Otty Lake, which her parents built in 1947.



From age 17 to 20 Gail worked at Rideau Regional Centre, in the Vocational Training Department, which paid her university tuition and launched her on a lifelong path of working with special youth in education. She began her higher education at Queens but returned to Ottawa due to family illness and completed her BA at Carleton. She obtained her B.Ed. at Western in London in the spring of 1977 and married a month later. Good fortune afforded her a teaching position in Barrie where she taught in a school constructed to socially and physically integrate developmentally delayed youth in “regular” school. For the next four years she worked with a team of 5 other teachers to instruct students from 4 to 21 years of age. They created a supportive yet challenging environment that provided basic literacy and numeracy at the elementary level, opened doors within the secondary level and helped graduates move to sheltered workshops and community living.

Gail obtained a M.Ed. from the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and became a working mother in 1980. Over the next 4 years she had three wonderful children: two boys and a girl. They enjoyed an active family life in Barrie filled with hockey, downhill skiing, boating Lake Simcoe and camping on Lake Huron, but were drawn back to Otty Lake for long weekends and summer vacations.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Gail Read.....continued from p.3

Meanwhile, Gail moved to “regular” grade school teaching and taught primary, junior and intermediate divisions. She was always very engaged in program development and, with 14 years of teaching experience, she became an administrator. Her administrative experience was diverse and included both urban and rural schools with student populations of 225 to 920, opening schools in the rapidly expanding region of Barrie, and becoming a Principal of Program and a Principal of Section. As Principal of Section, Gail supervised residential schools, lock-up facilities and a prison for 16-18 year olds convicted of violent crimes.

In 2005 Gail’s dream of moving to Otty Lake full time came to fruition as she moved to her new "home at the cottage" and the renovation that created a four season home. She transferred to the Upper Canada District School Board, participated in the opening of the new Smiths Falls District Collegiate Institute and enjoyed 4 years at the Montague Public School before retiring in 2010.

In the summer of 2010, following thirty-three years in education, she spent a much deserved six weeks travelling Europe with her daughter and following her retirement travel bug! She was invited to travel to Brazil and support English-Portuguese schools where she has visited eleven facilities from Sao Paulo to Manaus and Goiania to Natal. She has supported teacher training and assisted school owners in developing school policy and procedures.

Between trips to Brazil, Gail found a soul mate and fell in love with Ian McDonald who introduced her to Probus. They were recently married on the Mayan Riviera in the presence of their 5 children, their partners and 4 darling grandchildren.

Gail and Ian are returning to Natal, Brazil, later this month. Their travels will then take them on to explore the Peruvian Andes and Ecuador before returning to Otty Lake for the spring.

Gail loves her life, and her boundless energy is admired by all!

## Management Team Notes

- Gail Read has volunteered to assist Mary Kilgour in organizing special events..... when she is not travelling the world that is.
- The book exchange is working well and will continue to be offered. You are invited to bring in up to 4 books and take away as many as you wish, whether or not you have brought any books in.



*Treasurer Sherwin delivering the mid-term Financial Report (see page 6)*

## Speakers' Corner



Our speakers on March 4<sup>th</sup> will be **Helga and David Zimmerly**, who will give an illustrated talk on the risk-taking inherent in making an extended voyage by cruising sailboat. The risks discussed will range from the physical to the emotional and the financial, from storms to pirates to unstable political situations. The couple spent ten years cruising half-way around the world, from 1986 to 1995, via the Canadian Arctic, Europe, Africa and Asia before settling down in BurgessWood. They are in the process of writing a memoir about their adventures and Helga will also discuss the risks and rewards associated with that project.

For a hint of what you can expect, [please click here](#) for a sample from their e-book “The Voyage of Erasmus Volume 1 - Ottawa to the Arctic”.

## Lunch After March Meeting

To be held at Fiddlehead’s Restaurant  
53 Herriott Street, Perth

## The Talent Pool.....



We are blessed at Probus to have a wealth of talent and experience among our members.... people who have done the most amazing things. To

wit the presentation that will be given next month by David and Helga Zimmerly, who spent ten years sailing half-way around the world, from 1986 to 1995 by cruising sailboat. We have an eclectic mix of teachers, doctors, dentists, diplomats, armed forces personnel, bankers, politicians, engineers, inventors, environmentalists, social advocates, among many others. Happily, we can draw on this mix of talent to help out in many ways. The most readily apparent way is by asking people to share their experiences by making presentations at our monthly meetings, or by offering their self-introductions.

## .....Thank You



There is a fair amount of behind the scenes effort to keep the Probus ship afloat and it is reassuring to know that we can reach out for help when required and our members will respond. When the call went out at the January meeting for someone to give Mary Kilgour a hand with events planning, **Gail Read** stepped forward. **Valerie Stephenson-Gray** recently agreed to assist with the speaker's committee that is key to our excellent monthly program. At the February meeting, **Ernie Trischuk** stepped forward with his camera to take the pictures that appear in this edition. And **David Zimmerly** took charge of setting up the audio system for the meeting, when all others who know the system were either ill or out of the country. Finally, your Board works tirelessly to keep things rolling and all members of the Board and their assistants makes a major contribution to our continued success. *A huge Thank You to all of our volunteers.*



### New members welcomed at the February meeting

(LtoR) Don McDiarmid (Membership Director), Katharina Allen, Tom Barton, Bob Leitch, Jack Tannett, Ken Turriff, Janette Wood, Bill Kennedy (Vice-President)



PROBUS CLUB OF PERTH  
Mid-year Financial Report

(Statement of Cash Receipts and Disbursements from Aug. 1, 2014 to January 31, 2015)

<b>Bank balance @ Aug. 1, 2014</b>	<b>\$2,404.14</b>
<b>Plus income:</b>	
Memberships	2,740.00
Surplus, special events	95.78
<b>Total income:</b>	<b>\$2,835.78</b>
<b>Equals:</b>	<b>\$5,239.92</b>
<b>Less expenses:</b>	
Hall rental	650.00
Share of projector screen	200.00
Probus Centre-Canada insurance	312.50
Directors' and Officers' insurance	324.00
Registration for regional meeting	20.00
Wreath for Cenotaph, Nov.11	49.00
Legion donation for exec. coffee and storage of box	100.00
Copying	77.14
Speakers' gifts/lunches	255.29
Lunches for 90+ers	13.00
Name tags & pins	171.81
Cards	38.35
Postage	67.24
Past Pres. gift	75.00
Past Editor's gift	65.65
Coffee	141.74
Bank charges	86.43
<b>Total expenses:</b>	<b>\$2,647.15</b>
<b>Bank balance @ January 31, 2015</b>	<b>\$2,592.77</b>
Forecast of additional expenses to July 31, 2015	350.00
<b>Forecast of bank balance @ July 31, 2015</b>	<b>\$2,242.77</b>
	(about \$200 deficit)

**D. Sherwin, Treasurer,  
Jan. 31, 2015**