

March brings us celestial treats

By Raymond E. Bullock
special writer

Our recent spring-like weather notwithstanding, the month of March brings us the official start of that season as well as some striking celestial groupings.

As March begins, the brilliant "evening star" planet Venus is visible in the southwestern sky. Venus sets around 8:30 p.m., about two hours after the sun. By the end of the month, Venus won't be setting until after 9:30 p.m.

Five degrees to the lower right of Venus is Mars. This planet is much fainter than Venus — you may need binoculars to spot it.

IN THE LATE evening sky is Saturn, rising in the east-southeast after 10:30 p.m. Saturn is the bright "star" to the west (right) of the moon this morning in the southwestern sky before sunrise. To the right of Saturn is the star Spica in Virgo.

On Saturday morning, the moon is

approaching Jupiter in the south. By Sunday morning, the last quarter moon has passed that planet.

Below Jupiter is the reddish star Antares in Scorpius. The moon, Jupiter and Antares form a nice triangle in the south before sunrise.

New moon is on Monday, March 14. It is located between earth and sun, so it is not visible.

The crescent moon forms another triangle — this time with Venus and Mars — in the west after sunset on Wednesday, March 16. Mars, still to the lower right of Venus, remains a difficult object to spot.

Spring officially arrives in the northern hemisphere Sunday, March 20, at 11:39 p.m. The sun appears to follow an imaginary line around the sky called the ecliptic. Because earth's axis is tilted 23½ degrees, the ecliptic appears to be tilted with respect to another imaginary line called the celestial equator. The celestial equator divides the sky into two hemispheres, just as earth's equator divides our planet.

THE TILTED ecliptic crosses the celestial equator at two points, once as it angles from north to south and again from south to north. When the sun reaches the crossing point, going from south to north, it is at the vernal equinox, the official start of spring. The sun will rise due east and set due west.

Also on the evening of March 20, the crescent moon will be above the star Aldebaran, the "eye" of Taurus.

The moon is at first quarter on the evening of the 21st.

Two nights later, the moon will be in a line with Castor and Pollux, the two stars marking the heads of Gemini. Pollux is the star closest to the moon; Castor is above Pollux.

On the evening of Friday, March 25, the moon has drifted from Gemini, through Cancer and is now in Leo. The bright star to the lower right of the moon is Regulus, the "heart" of Leo.

Mercury is at superior conjunction on March 26. The planet is located behind the sun, as seen from earth, and is not visible to us.

Jupiter begins retrograde (backward) motion on Sunday, March 27. It

has been slowly moving eastward through the stars of Scorpius, but the orbital motion of the earth around the sun produces an optical illusion. Jupiter will appear to drift westward from one night to the next as earth comes around the sun and "catches up" to Jupiter.

FULL MOON is on Monday, March 28. The moon rises in the east as the sun sets in the west and is visible all night.

The moon, Saturn and Spica form a triangular grouping on the evening of March 29. Saturn is below the moon, Spica to the right. They will be seen rising in the east-southeast.

By the end of the month, Saturn rises after 8:30 p.m. and Venus sets about one hour later. Both planets are fascinating sights through a telescope. The observatory's telescope at Cranbrook Institute of Science is available for public viewing every Saturday night 8:30-10 p.m. For more information call 645-3200.

(The author is coordinator of the planetarium and observatory at Cranbrook Institute of Science.)

Roads newly paved

Farmington's 1982 road improvement program is complete with newly paved Grace and Adams streets and repairs on Drake Road.

The City Council Monday approved the final \$17,500 payment of the program's total \$57,000 bill.

Although most of the work was paid for with city funds, Farmington officials used a portion of the 1982 Community Development Block Grant to help pay for the Drake Road repairs.

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Teen to compete for title

Kim Schwanke, the 16-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Schwanke of Farmington, has been selected to compete in the 1983 Michigan Miss Teen Pageant the weekend of July 1-13 in Kalamazoo.

The pageant is the official statewide finals for the Miss Teen National Pageant, set for December in New Mexico.

Winner of the state pageant will receive an all-expense-paid trip to compete in the finals and a \$750 cash scholarship to the school of her choice.

Contestants are judged on scholastic achievement, volunteer service, formal presentation, an interview and a choice of speech or talent.

Kim is sponsored in the pageant by Vincent Big Boy, Real Estate One, Farmington Insurance Agency and Canton Glass Company.



Kim Schwanke

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