move westward, though more slowly than the stars. When it passes between Saturn and Spica, the trio will be about 25° above the southwestern horizon at sunset. After this, both planets will become harder to see against the glare of dusk as Earth's motion increases their distance, leaving them on the far side of the sun. Saturn will be on the far side of the sun, in a configuration known as conjunction, on October 25, but Mars' faster motion will delay its conjunction to April 17, 2013. After conjunction, planets move into the morning sky, rising before the sun instead of setting after it. Since Earth moves faster in its orbit than the outer worlds, conjunction is actually when we round the far side of the track and begin catching up to pass them once again. Saturn will be at opposition again on April 28, 2012, but it will take us until April 8, 2014 to overtake Mars again in the endless dance of the planets.

As well as planets, we have a wonderful opportunity to view a young crescent moon since the Vernal Equinox occurred at 1:13 this morning, and the new moon will occur on Thursday at 10:38 am. By Friday evening, the moon will be almost 20° from the sun, 14° above the horizon at sunset (7:15 pm) and set almost an hour and a half later (8:40 pm). If you have a low western horizon, look for the thin crescent moon above due west with binoculars after about 7:30. It's easier to spot initially with binoculars and then with the unaided eye. On Saturday evening, the moon will be two-thirds of the way between the horizon and Jupiter and set at 9:40 pm. Sunday night will give us a view of the moon just to the right (3° north) of Jupiter and Monday it will be just left (2° south) of Venus.

While you have your binoculars out, wait for dark to view some starry sights. The Orion nebula in the hunter's sword always provides a lovely view that will very soon now be lost in the glare of dusk. A Google search will provide spectacular images of this amazing star-formation region. A less known beauty is the Coma star cluster in Coma Berenices (KO-muh bear-ENN-uh-seez), the "hair of Bernice". This cluster of about 40 bright stars about 280 million light years away (about a billion billion miles ... ten to the eighteenth power) is only about 450 million years old. On Earth at the time of its birth, a shallow sea filled with Paleozoic life forms lapped up against the low remnants of the ancestral Adirondacks, depositing the sand that would become Potsdam Sandstone. On a clear evening, take the time to pull an Adirondack chair out of its winter home in the barn to spend a few minutes viewing and contemplating the beauty and wonder of the stars, moon and planets, including the wonderful world on which we have the privilege to live.

If you have questions about the stars, moon, planets or any other astronomical topic, please visit the Adirondack Public Observatory web site at apobservatory.org or email Aileen at aodonoghue@stlawu.edu.