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- Bert Pablo, Ph.D.: Staff Astronomer
- Michael Saladyga, Ph.D.: Technical Assistant, JAAVSO Production Editor
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This past year, upon developing AAVSO’s strategic plan with Harvard Business Association’s Community Action Partners (CAP), three key objectives stood out: increase the organization’s impact, fulfill high membership satisfaction, and achieve long-term financial stability. The AAVSO began implementing the strategic plan that it will carry out over the next few years.

2020 was a challenging year for many. Accompanying the most pressing and devastating of the virus-caused issues the world has been facing, has been isolation and activity restriction. Throughout this time, the AAVSO worked hard to provide accessible astronomy and observing education. We offered our 2020 CHOICE courses free of charge, and our volunteer CHOICE educators increased the time and energy they put into the courses to accommodate additional participants.
We also held our Observing Sections’ Webinar Series free of charge and our volunteer AAVSO ambassadors created online educational materials and contributed to virtual events.

We now distribute the *Journal of the AAVSO* (JAAVSO) more widely: newly published editions become immediately available to anyone on AAVSO’s website. In 2020, we all connected with other astronomers, AAVSO membership grew, and data was more frequently submitted to our databases.

The AAVSO continues to make education as accessible to anyone, anywhere as possible; our staff members enthusiastically and diligently work to connect our community with others, and help people advance in their astronomy journeys.

Our community spans generations, and each can learn from one another—astronomy and education bridge gaps, grow knowledge, and create unity. The togetherness the astronomy community invites is something we can all use a bit more of, so let’s continue to grow it!
2020. The year no one could have envisioned—or wanted. My granddaughter says it will be a swear word people use in the future.

As I write, the pandemic surges again. And yet, we are lucky. Through the “magic” of science, vaccines are on the way. This pandemic, too, shall pass. But the lives of many of our fellow citizens are changed forever.

So, as we look at the past year, we must keep the AAVSO in perspective. Each of us must do what we can to defeat this virus and help those whose lives have been severely impacted.

AAVSO’s 2020

2020 concluded AAVSO’s strategic planning work. Our focus on high member satisfaction, increased organizational impact, and developing a plan for long-term financial stability, led to changes and new initiatives. These included revitalizing our observing sections and improving our IT systems by enhancing our website and software tools. We also increased our training and provided a phenomenally successful summer webinar series attended by hundreds of individuals worldwide. We increased our ties with professionals, enhancing our alerts. We began expanding our focus on spectroscopy, exoplanets, and data mining through our CHOICE courses and workshops. Our annual meeting with the spectroscopy and TESS data mining workshops had great participation and showcased our successful migration to an entirely online meeting format.
Membership has grown from 1,100 in 2015 to 1,400 today. Our AAVSO International Database (AID) now contains over 43 million observations! Solar observers submitted twenty thousand observations in the past year, and our new exoplanet and spectroscopy databases continue to grow.

Roughly 400 research papers were published referencing our work, and our most recent JAAVSO volume had twenty-one articles, an increase from previous years. And, Sky and Telescope magazine highlighted our contributions to science in their January 2021 edition!

Most importantly, members are commenting on the new ways we are connecting with them and supporting their work. There is genuine enthusiasm for the organization. People are enjoying being members of AAVSO.

More changes are coming. We continue to focus on making AAVSO a dynamic, vibrant organization.

One brief comment regarding our finances—please consider a donation to AAVSO. Our long-range financial stability requires that we reduce the annual withdrawals from our endowment to a sustainable level. We need support from members to allow us to grow and ensure AAVSO’s future viability. Please contribute—every dollar makes a difference!

I hope you had a good year and were able to participate in our webinar series and meetings. AAVSO enables us to enjoy and participate in our shared passion for astronomy.

Clear skies!

Gordon Myers, AAVSO Board President
Letter from the Director

Friends,

I am sure all of us welcomed the end of 2020, a year when the pandemic disrupted our lives, threatened our health, and weakened our economies and the wellbeing of many of us. Even under those circumstances, at the AAVSO, we recognize that there is an urgent need for all of us to focus on the big picture. We know that we have a duty to serve you and provide the infrastructure, knowledge, information, and strong community that enables you to observe and study variable stars. Your work helps us all feel less isolated and a bigger part of an extraordinary group of people who learn about the universe.

As Churchill said, “never waste a good crisis.” During 2020, the AAVSO team adjusted to the new reality of working from home and stayed focused on our tasks at hand. We completed our two-year strategic plan, we wrapped up a significant technology and web page migration, and we launched new initiatives (such as our webinar series). We empowered our volunteer teams, we increased diversity through enhancing our ambassador program, and we engaged in new collaborations. We also provided a three-weekend virtual Annual Meeting and two workshops, and we connected with our international community in a way that is stimulating and rewarding.
So, with a new year begun, what do we have to look forward to? With promising news on vaccines, perhaps there is hope for returning to a more enjoyable world where we can all meet in person. As we celebrate 110 years of the AAVSO’s founding, we will start executing the strategic plan programmatic priorities and provide you a better, refreshed AAVSO. We will focus on training and helping our observers, securing and enhancing our databases and software tools, and providing engagement opportunities in more key projects, while continuing our legacy work. We will reach out to “anyone, anywhere” virtually through our free webinars and How-to Hours, and we will foster key partnerships to widely disseminate the AAVSO’s value and engage more interested individuals in the excitement of scientific discovery.

Read more about our strategic plan at https://www.aavso.org/StrategicPlan 2020. We hope you’ll be inspired to continue to embrace and support the AAVSO’s work toward these goals.

YOU are the AAVSO!

Best wishes—clear skies,

Stella Kafka, PhD
AAVSO Executive Director
As an organization that has been around for over 100 years, the AAVSO knows a thing or two about stability. However, the part about stability that many people overlook is that it requires adaptation to an ever-changing world landscape.

This is especially true on the internet where application updates are made weekly—if not daily—largely due to security issues. Vulnerabilities are found all the time and applications must be updated to mitigate them. Since this is an area where the AAVSO has been lacking, we came into this year with the goal of making our infrastructure more sustainable and more secure.

After many hours of staff, volunteer, and contractor time, we were finally able to deploy our new website infrastructure at the end of the year. From the outside, you will have noticed a slightly updated and more modern theme on the website, as well as some small changes in content location. However, behind the scenes are where the real changes have been made. We have changed the way our applications and databases communicate, fixed several issues that have been an annoyance to users, and most importantly made future updates easier.

We recognize that change is difficult, and we really appreciate your patience. New always takes some getting used to, but we will be there every step of the way to answer your questions and help however we can. Most importantly, though, we are now better positioned to serve you, our community—both now and for many years to come.
International Variable Star Index (VSX) Update

The International Variable Star Index (VSX) is an evolving database that includes most variable star catalogues and stars published in variable star listings and journals, plus discoveries submitted by individual researchers. The number of users and submissions remains stable; people all over the world contribute discoveries and revisions to VSX. This past year, we added 1,056 exoplanets to VSX to enable our observers to submit data on those objects.

The VSX Team, led by Sebastián Otero, works with the aim of keeping VSX as up to date and free from errors as possible. Otero and Patrick Wils provide feedback to observers. Otero, Wils, Klaus Bernhard, and Patrick Schmeer maintain VSX and add data, including stars from alert pages (largely ASAS-SN, ATel, Gaia, TNS, vsnet-alert, and CBAT), and new objects or data published in papers or journals (updates from the now inactive Information Bulletin on Variable Stars are complete). Wils upgrades VSX to provide a friendly experience.

From October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020, 130 identifications were corrected for stars in the General Catalogue of Variable Stars (GCVS), duplicate entries were deleted, and inconsistencies between data in VSX and our other databases were rectified. Comparison stars in our comparison star database (VSD) that turned out to be variable, were eliminated from sequences and replaced with help from the Sequence Team.

On September 27, 2020 (one year after we reached 1,000,000 objects), we achieved a huge milestone of 2 million objects entered into VSX! About 665,000 of them came from the ZTF DR2 Catalogue of Periodic Variable Stars, and surveys like ASAS-SN contributed as well. We also imported several hundreds of new variables reported by Gabriel Murawski.

We updated information on all known R Coronae Borealis stars, added new ones, and incorporated the most recent updates on more than 10,000 stars published in the GCVS.

We doubled our efforts to provide more options to participate in variable star astronomy, including launching VSX data mining projects (also useful to those who are not able to observe). These projects are at https://www.aavso.org/vsx-data-mining.

We thank all the people who contribute to VSX, the VSX Team, and the AAVSO staff, for the excellent work they have been performing.
The JAAVSO advances the mission of the AAVSO by enabling variable star researchers to publish their results after peer review, showcasing amateur-professional collaborations, enabling authors to deposit their data in an open repository, and providing beginning astronomers with an accessible introduction to variable star research. Authors include student, professional, and amateur astronomers.

Nancy Morrison continued as Editor; Associate Editor Elizabeth O. Waagen, and Production Editor Michael Saladyga continued in their roles. This report summarizes indicators of progress toward strategic goals.

One goal of the JAAVSO is to increase the size and usage of our openly available data archive—we encourage authors to archive the data supporting their research results. Being in a machine-readable format, the archived tables are more accessible to researchers than they are on the formatted journal page. To find these tables, readers perform a text search on the character string ‘ftp’ in the PDF version of a published journal.

A major goal of the JAAVSO is to raise its profile in the professional and amateur astronomical communities. One measure of its impact is the quantity of published content as indicated by article counts and page counts. It is too soon to tell whether the larger article count in Volume 48, number 2 is the beginning of a trend, although we can say that the article queue for Volume 49, number 1 is well populated.

Another measure of the JAAVSO’s presence in the community is the number of citations our articles have received in other journals. It is too soon for citation data on Volume 48 to be significant, but we observe that, for Volume 47, there were ten such citations. This count includes authors’ citations of their own papers; what is significant is the appearance of the citations in other journals. Citation counts are from the NASA Astrophysics Data System (https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu). We will extend these citation searches forward and backward in time.
Figure 1. Statistical information on published articles for the years 2019 and 2020 (Volumes 47 and 48). The leftmost panel counts articles in all the categories of each issue (not including meeting abstracts). The middle panel displays the total page count of those articles. The rightmost panel displays the number of articles that have a combination of non-professional (amateur, citizen scientist) and professional authorship.

**JAAVSO** has a number of articles authored jointly by amateur and professional astronomers (Figure 1, right-hand panel). Professionals are defined here to be researchers who are affiliated with a college, university, or research institute, whether they be professional scientific staff or students. The appearance of strong growth should be viewed with caution, since the numbers are small. Continued monitoring of these numbers will tell the story.

To support additional content and to increase the number of professional astronomers who are familiar with the **JAAVSO**, we have enlarged the pool of scientific referees. During production of the current volume, 28 new referees were involved, to make a total of 93 active referees. Of the new referees, 15 are located at institutions outside the U.S.

Finally, we were pleased to see that a new column in *Sky and Telescope*, “Pro-Am Conjunction,” devoted its first number (Hannikainen 2021)1 to the AAVSO. We hope to share news of **JAAVSO** in future publications about the AAVSO!

Ambassadors’ Corner

What an incredible Ambassador team we have! I’ve been involved in the program leadership-wise since January 2020, and I’ve seen the program grow and evolve in a really fun way. It’s only going to continue to do just that. Lindsay Ward has done a great job guiding our team and keeping us all involved and engaged. This year, the Ambassadors created educational videos, outreached via webinars, and participated in AAVSO core initiatives. All of our content is at www.aavso.org/ambassador-program.

One of these core goals is dear to my heart—Diversity & Inclusion—which is what I’ve largely been focusing on with the AAVSO’s new Diversity Committee, and includes future partnerships with organizations to benefit the community and the AAVSO. The other Ambassadors have been out in the world showing just how cool and fun variable star research and data collection can be, whether you’re a professional, student, or amateur. We’re having a lot of fun and it’s continuing! The stars are for everyone! I’m looking forward to what we will all get up to in 2021!

--Heather Laird,
Volunteer Ambassador Leader
Prior to becoming an AAVSO Ambassador, I wanted to learn more about exoplanets and share what I learn with others; however, I wasn’t sure how to turn my ideas into actions. I wanted to be an active member within an astronomy community, but I didn’t know where I fit.

Fortunately, I met Stella Kafka a few years ago, and Stella gave me an opportunity to grow in my astronomy passion as an AAVSO Ambassador. With Stella’s energetic mentorship, I created an exoplanet presentation, “Exoplanets: Earth 2.0,” which I proudly presented at my biotech company and at my community college. Soon afterwards, I met other talented AAVSO ambassadors from around the world who inspired me to push myself out of my comfort zone. Another AAVSO ambassador and observer, Molly Wakeling, personally (via zoom) gave me step-by-step directions on setting up a telescope for the first time, and I was ecstatic when I finally had the moon in view. Lauren Herrington eagerly provided support on telescopes and spectroscopy, and after viewing Lauren’s presentation during AAVSO’s Spectroscopy Workshop, I felt confident I could successfully do spectroscopy once I had the right equipment. Lindsay Ward’s great leadership skills provided us opportunities to engage with our community, such as the AAVSO Annual Meeting and AAVSO social media takeovers, and supported our individual astronomy passions through one-on-ones and team meetings.

I appreciate my fellow AAVSO ambassadors, and look forward to 2020’s ambassador projects! Maybe I’ll even get a chance to teach someone how to set up their telescope for the first time!

--Ana Parra, Volunteer Ambassador Leader
AAVSO Awards Presented in 2020

2020 AAVSO Directors Award

The AAVSO proudly recognizes the members of Harvard Business School’s Community Action Partners (CAP) for their outstanding contribution of time, expertise, and commitment to the organization. The involvement of and input from each of the seven members listed below helped to guide the future direction of the AAVSO. The impact of each individuals’ work will increase the AAVSO’s outreach to citizen scientists worldwide, strengthen our ties with the international astronomical community, and showcase our achievements.

From all of us at the AAVSO, thank you to the following CAP members for challenging us to reach higher and providing us with the tools to succeed:

★ Marilyn Averill ★ Brian Kopperl
★ Alan Eisenberg ★ Arthuer Pfaelzer
★ Jeanne Friedman ★ Diogo Teixeira
★ John Giudice

The CAP team, along with some AAVSO staff at our first meeting, 2019
The 109th AAVSO Annual Meeting was originally to be held in Somerville, Massachusetts, along with in-person workshops on Data Mining and Spectroscopy. The pandemic forced us to convert to a virtual format, and we spread the events over three weekends between October and November.

The virtual format enabled people to participate who would otherwise not have been able to. Over 150 individuals from 26 countries attended some combination of the three events, making 2020’s workshops and Annual Meeting the most international in the AAVSO’s history!

Data Mining Workshop attendees installed software on their devices prior to the workshop to follow the workshop leader, Colin Littlefield, in real time as he worked through the software. Spectroscopy Workshop participants received a wealth of information from leaders Ken Hudson and François Cochard, as well as from other knowledgeable presenters.

The online events were a great success—training, practice, and teamwork helped the events go smoothly, and attendee feedback showed a very high level of satisfaction. Although attendees could not enjoy conversations over a cup of coffee, the virtual format enabled them to meet colleagues from around the world, many of whom were attending their first AAVSO event, and some of whom were connecting with fellow astronomy enthusiasts for the first time. Attendees new to the AAVSO learned how to contribute to variable star research with us.

The workshops and the Annual Meeting were sponsored by QHYCCD, Obstech, Optical Structures, First Light Observatory Systems, and iTelescope.

We are also grateful for all the support of individuals!
Named for Friedrich Argelander, who is considered to be "the father of variable star astronomy," The Argelander Society offers membership benefits to those individuals who have given substantial financial support to the AAVSO over many years. Once a benefactor has donated a cumulative total of $35,000.00 to the AAVSO, they are eligible for a lifetime membership in the organization, free registration to annual meetings, invitations to special events, special awards, and tokens of the association’s appreciation.

The AAVSO gratefully acknowledges the benefactor members of

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Betelgeuse light curve of visual observations from AAVSO observers, February 1, 2020 to September 12, 2020

This spectra sequence shows a short overview of spectra from February to April 2020, taken with the spectrograph LHIRES III (R ~ 17000) and different telescopes. Coordinates: R.A. 00 56 42.53 Dec. +60 43 00.3 (2000.0) (source: VSX page for gam Cas)

gam Cas is an observing campaign star: https://www.aavso.org/aavso-alert-notice-707
### Treasurer’s Report

**October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020**

Robert Stephens, Treasurer, AAVSO, 49 Bay State Road, Cambridge, MA 02138

**American Association of Variable Star Observers**

**Statement of Financial Position,**

**September 30, 2020**

#### Assets

**Current Assets**
- Cash and cash equivalents  $548,290
- Prepaid expenses  23,606
- Investments  11,962,011

**Total Current Assets**  12,533,907

**Property and Equipment, Net of Accumulated Depreciation**  1,174,455

**Total Assets**  $13,708,362

#### Liabilities and Net Assets

**Current Liabilities**
- Accounts payable and accrued expenses  $56,362
- Prepaid membership dues and meetings  54,356

**Total Current Liabilities**  110,718

**Long Term Liabilities**
- Security deposit and last month’s rent  9,161

**Net Assets**
- Without donor restrictions  10,043,213
- With donor restrictions  3,545,270

**Total Net Assets**  13,588,483

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets**  $13,708,362
American Association of Variable Star Observers
Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets
For the Year Ended September 30, 2020

Changes in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions
Unrestricted Revenues, Gains and Other Support

- Contributions and grants $82,451
- Membership dues and fees 88,374
- Sales of publications and related material 5,648
- Meeting fees 34,005
- Annex rent 36,643
- Investment income 370,133
- Unrealized gain (loss) on investments (169,198)
- Gain (loss) on sale of investments (428,045)
- Net assets released from purpose restrictions 15,513

Total Unrestricted Revenues, Gains and Other Support 35,524

Expenses
- Program Services:
  - research, data collection, publication, and meetings 708,747
  - General and administrative 249,450
  - Fundraising 39,420
- Total Expenses 997,617

Increase in Unrestricted Net Assets (962,093)

Changes in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions

- Contributions and grants 24,023
- Investment income 6,876
- Unrealized gain (loss) on investments (3,143)
- Gain (loss) on sale of investments (7,951)
- Assets released from program restrictions (15,513)

Decrease in Temporarily Restricted Net Assets 4,292

Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets (957,801)

Net Assets – Beginning of Year 14,546,284
Net Assets – End of Year $13,588,483
“Thank you!” to all of our incredible donors, observers, members, and program participants for your valuable support and contributions throughout the year! You each make the AAVSO’s work and astronomical discoveries possible, and you have a lasting positive impact on the scientific community!