

STAR STRUCK

Catch a shooting star and put it in your pocket

One of the simple pleasures of summer is sitting outside at night and looking up at the stars. It's free and effortless, and people have been doing it for as long as there have been people. It's enjoyable even if you can't tell Ursa Major from Uranus.

If you would like to know what you're looking at while stargazing, all you need is a smart phone or digital tablet. There's a galaxy of websites and apps that tell you which celestial bodies you're looking at.

In-the-sky.org is a website that can help you plan an evening of stargazing. It's a comprehensive guide to the moon, stars, planets, satellites and other objects and



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

phenomena above your head. And I mean that literally. The site lets you enter your location and then generates maps of the sky as it appears where and when you are.

The site has many sections that are accessible from links in the navigation bar at the top of the page and a column of links on the right side.

The News section lists upcoming celestial events of interest, such as the phases of the moon,

meteor showers, positions of planets and more. The Charts section has a collection of star charts depicting different areas of the galaxy. Many of them are interactive and 3-D.

Other sections cover satellite locations, comets, rising and setting times of objects, constellations, weather forecasts and much more. You can even download and build your own planisphere, which is a hand-held star chart.

Portable star chart

While In-the-sky.org is great for researching and planning what to look for in the night sky, you can't beat apps such as **Star Chart** for actual viewing experiences.

The main feature of the app is

Sky View. You just hold your device up to the sky and it displays a real-time image of the heavenly bodies. As you pan across the sky with your device, the screen updates to display whatever is in that region of the sky at the time.

You can select which type of objects to label, such as stars, planets, constellations, etc. So if you're not sure whether you're looking at Venus or Mars, just hold up your phone or tablet and the app will name it for you.

Other features of the app let you search for specific objects and travel through space to view objects as if you were in a space ship. There's detailed information available on everything you see. A calendar sec-

tion lets you know what celestial events are upcoming.

The app works on iOS and Android. The limited version is free with in-app purchases available to expand its capabilities. The free version will meet the needs of most casual stargazers.

So if you're looking for something to do tonight, step outside, lay a blanket on the ground, fire up your mobile device and look to the heavens for some timeless entertainment.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.