Mon Sep 20 2010  H.G. WELLS
Herbert George Wells was born on September 21st, 1866. He wrote The Time Machine, The Invisible Man, and one of my favorites, The War of the Worlds, The War of the Worlds was published at the end of the 19th century, at a time when there was a really big “Mars mania” sweeping the planet. The American astronomer Percival Lowell had recently announced his discovery of canals on Mars (Lowell was mistaken by the way; his telescope allowed him to see natural features on Mars like the Mariner Valley, but didn’t give him enough resolution to see them as vague lines which he interpreted to be canals.) But at the time there was common agreement that life must exist on the red planet. If you’d like to investigate Mars for yourself, you should be able to find it over in the western sky after sunset this month. You’ve probably noticed a bright star above the setting sun these past few weeks. That’s not Mars, though, it’s Venus. Now to the right of Venus, you’ll find a dimmer, slightly orange star – that’s Mars.

Tue Sep 21 2010  HOLST’S “THE PLANETS”
Gustav Holst was born 136 years ago, on September 21st, 1874. He wasn’t an astronomer, but a classical music composer, and in fact his knowledge of astronomy was rather limited; but he wrote a piece of music that you often hear on this radio station, and also quite a bit in planetariums. It's called, "The Planets", and in it Holst wrote music to describe each of the 8 known planets - Pluto hadn't yet been discovered. The music mirrors the characteristics of each planet and the mythical gods they represent. So Mercury, which takes only 88 days to go around the sun, has a fast-paced, allegro tempo, fitting for the messenger of the gods; while slow-moving Saturn, which takes over 29 years to orbit the sun, has music that is slower and more stately. War-like Mars is militant, The love goddess Venus is beautiful, and the music for Jupiter is majestic, as befits the King of the planets.

Wed Sep 22 2010  EQUINOX: AUTUMN BEGINS/FULL HARVEST MOON
Autumn begins tonight. This is the autumnal equinox, and at 11:09 PM, Eastern Daylight Savings Time, the sun’s rays will fall most directly on the earth’s equator. Not here obviously, not when we’re approaching midnight. No, this phenomenon – the sun appearing at the zenith at the earth’s equator - is occurring over on the other side of the planet. But it’s at this time of the year that everyone around the world enjoys days and nights of pretty much equal length, hence the term “equinox,” which means “equal night”. Also, the moon is full today, and since it’s the full moon that’s nearest the autumnal equinox, that makes it the Harvest Moon. In the old days, the light of this full moon was a help to farmers who brought in their harvest of crops, both day and night. The moon’s orbital path is fairly shallow at this time of year, which gives it some extra time above our horizon. Tonight you’ll find the Harvest moon in the east after sunset; nearby it is a bright star-like object, actually the planet Jupiter.

Thu Sep 23, 2010  NEPTUNE DISCOVERED, URANUS AT OPPOSITION
On September 23rd in the year 1846, the planet Neptune was discovered by the astronomer Johanne Gottfried Galle at the Berlin Observatory. What he saw through the observatory’s 9 inch refracting telescope was a tiny blue dot – was it just another star? Galle checked the star charts and found that this was an uncharted object, “not on the map!” The next night the dot had moved against the background of fixed stars - it was a planet. Neptune is still in our sky, it’s in the southeast after sunset, near the border between the constellations Capricornus and Aquarius. A small telescope will reveal Neptune as Galle saw it - a tiny, round, blue dot. Now a little off to the east of Neptune, there’s another planet, Uranus, which is at opposition, meaning that it's on the opposite side of the sky from where the sun's located. Look to the east around 9 PM. That bright star you see is not Uranus, but Jupiter. Uranus is about a degree away, and can be seen as another tiny blue dot with a small telescope.

Fri Sep 24, 2010  IRSC 50TH ANNIVERSARY, PLANETARIUM OPEN HOUSE
Indian River State College is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this weekend, on Saturday September 25th, from noon until 4 PM. There will be a lot of activities on the Fort Pierce campus, and the event is free and open to the public. The Hallstrom Planetarium will also offer mini-shows about our upcoming season of programs, and about the things visible in the current evening sky, especially the constellations of early autumn, such as Cygnus the Swan, Lyra the Harp, Aquila the Eagle, Scorpius the Scorpion, Sagittarius the Archer, and Pegasus the Flying Horse; and planets that can be found in the current evening sky: Venus, Mars and Jupiter. Lots of telescopes will also be set up and operated by members of the Treasure Coast Astronomical Society; there’ll be safe, filtered solar viewing on Saturday afternoon, and the TCAS telescope operators will show off planets, stars and nebulae in deep space once darkness sets in – weather permitting of course.