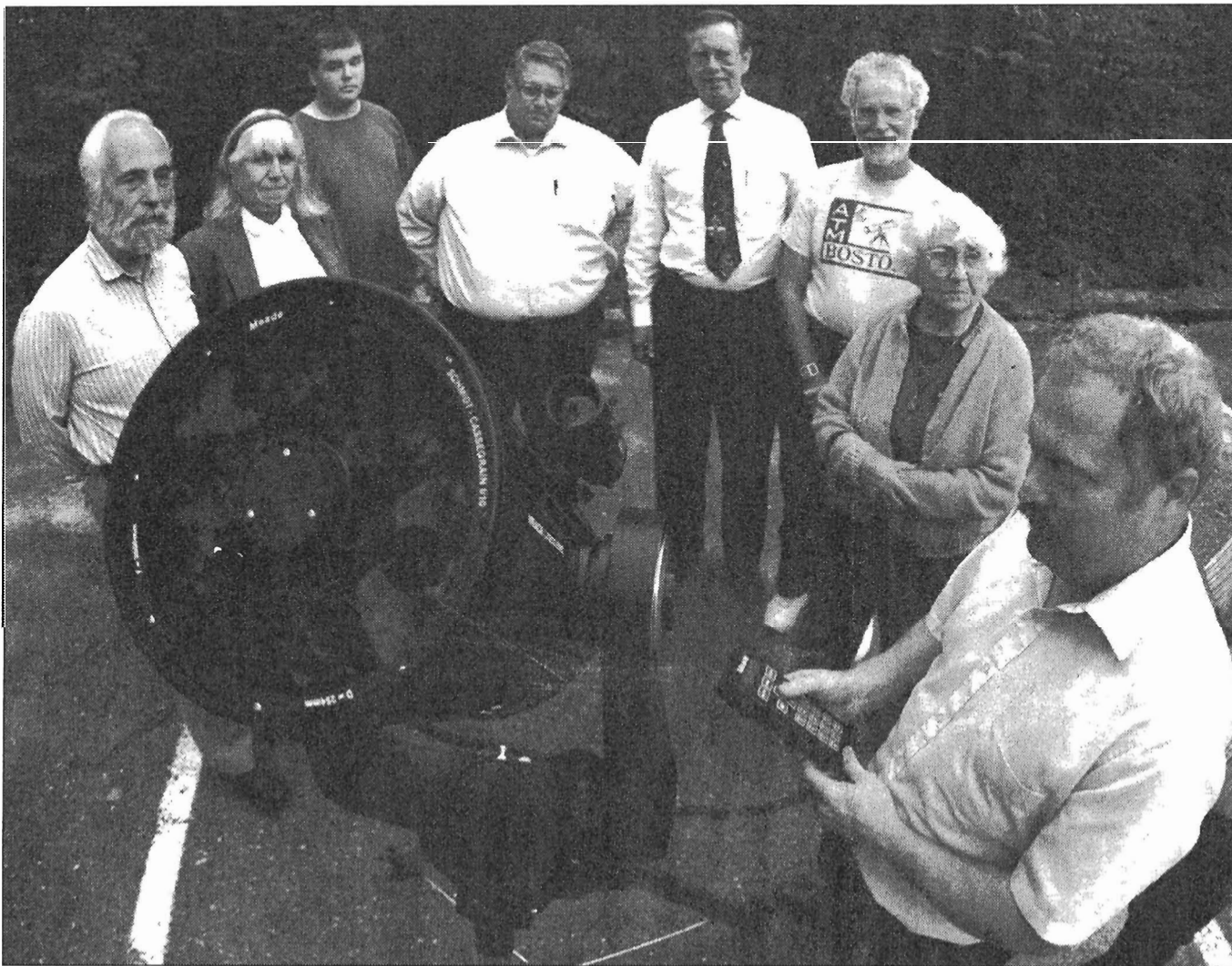


They've got stars in their eyes



Bob Sorenson operates a Meade 2,600-millimeter 8-inch telescope with a remote programmer at society meeting.

GLOBE PHOTO / DEBEE TLUMACKI

Astronomical Society members gaze at the heavens for a hobby

By Karen Hayes
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

NORWELL - Lois Horton, 85, first got stars in her eyes back in the 1930s. But Horton could not afford to buy a telescope to pursue her budding interest in amateur astronomy. Undaunted, she came up with \$9 to take an adult education course in lens grinding.

"The only way I could get a telescope was to make one," she said during a recent meeting of the South Shore Astronomical Society.

Horton, of Halifax, is one of the original members of the society founded in 1958. And she is still contemplating the heavens through the lenses of those 4-inch and 6-inch telescopes that she constructed 60 years ago.

The 35-member society attracts amateur astronomers, whose ages range from 15 to 85, from all over the region south of Boston. It is the only such club in the area. Others nearby are the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston and the Cape Cod Astronomical Society.

The group meets monthly for business, slide shows and cookies provided by Horton at the Council on Aging office across from Centennial Park. It also stargazes in the park, which is remote enough to provide an unobstructed view. The society stopped meeting at the South Shore Natural Science Center when a growing treeline

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GLOBE PHOTO / DEBEE TLUMACKI

South Shore Astronomical Society members Cathy Leamy and Lois Horton look over photos of telescopes and observatories.

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and light pollution from the Hanover Mall began to obscure the night sky.

It also takes part in stargazing events throughout the area. This month, Rolf Egon of Weymouth, society president, gave a slide presentation on the Andromeda Galaxy and other heavenly bodies, followed by public viewing through members' telescopes at Chickatawbut Hill in the Blue Hills Reservation.

A few others besides Horton use homemade telescopes, but many have invested in sophisticated equipment. Dubbed "lazy-man's telescopes" by members, some can be computer-programmed to automatically zero in on the planet or star of your choice at the touch of a button.

Many members, such as Frank Masciulli of Hanson, are astrophotographers. Masciulli, a former society president and current vice president, said he has about \$3,000 worth of equipment.

But you do not have to sink astronomical sums into the hobby, and you do not have to be a rocket scientist to join the society. "It really is quite a heartwarming sight seeing someone see the rings around Saturn for the first time," Egon said.

Although a fancy telescope and camera package can run \$7,000, novices can get their celestial feet wet with a pair of 750-power binoculars mounted on a tripod.

"You can get the bug with a pair of binoculars," said Bob Heilman, 78, of Raynham, who has been a member for five years. Heilman, who is a retired engineer, built a small observatory around his permanently mounted 11-inch telescope.

Adam Gudinas, 16, of Brockton, began attending meetings this year after he got a telescope. He recently started his junior year at Brockton High, where he is taking an astronomy course.

During this month's meeting, Don Greeley, a dentist from Hingham, gave an entertaining lecture on the longest total solar eclipse in centuries, which occurred in July 1991 and lasted seven minutes. Slides from his trip to the Baja Peninsula in Mexico with Boston's astronomy group accompanied the talk.

Group discussion of solar prominences was interspersed with jokes about using mylar for "safe sun" and comparing Corona beer with the corona around the sun. This

FYI

The South Shore Astronomical Society meets the first Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Norwell Council on Aging office, 293 Pine St. Free. Membership in the society, which costs \$32 yearly, includes 12 issues of *Astronomy magazine*. Upcoming events include a look at sun spots during the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Farm Day in Marshfield on Oct. 1, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., and a slide show and sky viewing at the Norton library at 7 p.m. Oct. 26. Call Rolf Egon, 337-2572.

is not a stuffy group.

And members divine more than science from stargazing. For Greeley, viewing the total solar eclipse was an awe-inspiring experience.

"The strangest effect I got was I could hear the eclipse in my mind," he said. "It was a very dramatic thing to see." Members, eyes glued to the luminous circles of moon and sun on the screen, murmured understanding.

The skies were clear when Greeley viewed that eclipse. But star gazing is always controlled by the weather. "In New England, it's terrible," Horton said.

Although nothing as spectacular as Halley's Comet, which the society viewed in 1985, is expected soon, amateur astronomers still have plenty to look at in the night sky.

Masciulli advises looking for the brightest "star" in the southern sky this month, which will be the planet Saturn. A planet can be discerned from a star because it appears to flicker, he said. Jupiter and some of its moons are also easily visible.

Most of us share a fascination with the wonders of the universe. "You can always attract people if you have a telescope out," Greeley said. "It's happened to me at the end of my driveway."