

FOCAL



POINT

Newsletter for the

Milwaukee Astronomical Society

Special Issue, July 1993

Remembrance

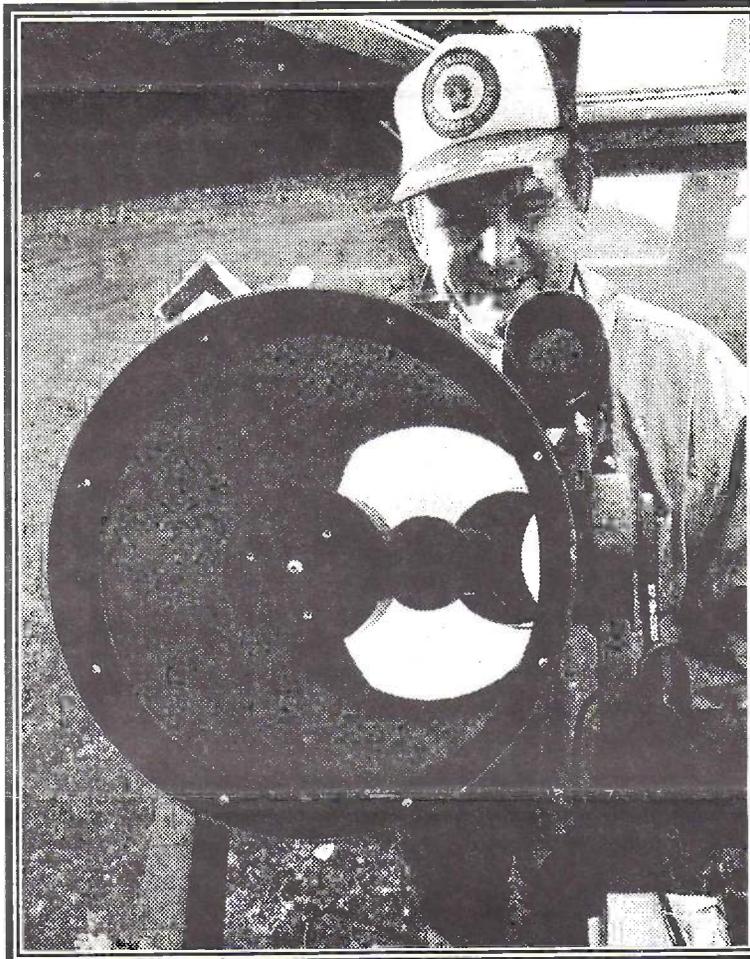
I first met Richard when I joined MAS 7 years ago. From the beginning, I enjoyed his warmth, wit and wisdom. In the following years I came to know a man completely committed to serving our society and also the public.

Always eager to share, Open Houses gave Dick the opportunity to display his love of the night sky, and this he did for All, aiming his trusty C-8 at the many sky delights he so enjoyed. How many people got hooked from this experience, who can say—I know I did. Thank you Richard.

More intense observing was reserved for campouts. You knew you were at the right Greenbush site when you saw Dick alongside his Dob, readying it for the night's viewing. And at Astrofest Dick's arrival assured us of lively banter about the trip down as well as remarks about the weekend's agenda of fun. Speaking of fun, I remember many MAS Picnics where Richard arrived early and stayed late, sharing animated conversation with the verve generated from a lifetime of rich and varied experiences. Yes, Richard was our friend, and we his.

He was also our leader. As president of our society, we looked to him to provide direction and purpose at our meetings. This he conscientiously did. Richard's personality and

(continued top right column)



Richard Wiesen 1933-1993

MAS president, Richard Wiesen, passed away on July 4, 1993.

This special issue of the Focal Point is dedicated to Dick, who touched many lives and was an active and honored member of our society. Dick will be sadly missed by all. See other side for memorial information.

presence permeated our society's many activities and events. Yes, we will miss Richard. We already do. But he and his good deeds now form a permanent part of MAS's heritage and will live on in remembrance by his many friends and admirers both within and outside of our society.

Matthew McNeely

I Remember...

I remember when I was a fairly new member helping out at an Open House and was attempting to deliver a message to a member inside the quonset building. Doc intercepted me at the rear door with an intimidating scowl and a gruff, "What do you want with (John)?" I didn't know Doc well, of course, so it took me a couple of seconds to see through this

facade. I gave him a big smile to show he hadn't fooled me, then Doc broke into his famous, sly grin and let me pass. Another incident which impressed me occurred during a discussion about a certain course of action the Board was considering. Although some recommended pursuing a slightly devious route, Doc simply asked "Don't we have a gentlemen's agreement, and aren't we all gentlemen?"

Sally Waraczynski

Quite a Character

We were blessed to have had Dick among us, for he was a character in the true sense of the word.

Whether it was at "Doc's Pier" at the Observatory or under the inky skies of Greenbush, he gave of himself generously to anyone approaching one of his several observing set-ups (a fully loaded C-8, high quality 94mm refractor, 12.5-inch Dobsonian, or tripod-mounted giant binoculars).

Dick played a big part in the camaraderie that exists in our club. His expressive nature and presence were a delight and his love for astronomy an inspiration to all. Anyone who spent even a few minutes with him is better off from the experience.

Tom Gill

In Tribute

I was a neophyte member in May 1982, having joined the M.A.S. just eight months before. Hardly anyone in the Society knew me at the time. I'd been active in amateur astronomy since 1975, but had never joined an amateur group. I had attended several regional meetings and one national Astronomical League convention prior to joining the M.A.S. After my membership was official and during a phone conversation with Jim Toeller in October 1981, (he was Treasurer and Membership Chairman then) I learned that a committee had been formed within the M.A.S. to handle the planning of the 1982 NCRAL convention. The convention was to be sponsored by the Society and held in May 1982 at Carroll College. I decided to take the plunge, get involved, and join the committee. Because of that participation, I was asked to run for a position on the Board of Directors in the spring of 1982 by Dan Schroeder, the M.A.S. Vice-President at that time. At the May membership meeting Dan read the names of three candidates for a like number of open positions on the Board, mine being one of them.

Just before the slate was about to be elected unanimously, my good friend Aris Penikis nominated a guy by the name of Dick Wiesen. Just like me, Dick had joined the M.A.S. during the prior year. He and Aris had become friends. As Aris nominated Dick, he mentioned that he had actively supported the 1981 Open House pro-

grams with his attendance. "He brought his Celestron out to every one of them last year", I remember Aris saying, "and I think he'd do a good job on the Board!"

Now we had four candidates for three positions. There was nothing wrong with this situation of course. Over the past ten years or so many of the annual M.A.S. Board elections have involved more candidates than we had positions to fill. But I'd been approached two months before about running for the Board, and I really had my heart set on working with many of the same people who were serving on the convention committee with me. I was developing friendships with others like me who loved astronomy, and I wanted that to continue. I was pretty sure I wouldn't get elected, especially with Aris' ringing endorsement of Dick!

Frank Roldan was the President at the time, and it was his duty to run the election. Dick's nomination caught him by surprise; he hadn't made up any paper ballots because he expected an election by voice acclamation. Someone quickly came up with some scrap paper and those members in attendance made some makeshift ballots. Everyone wrote down their three choices and the ballots were collected and counted during the evening program. I must not have paid much attention to it since I can't recall the subject or even who gave the presentation.

Afterward the election results were announced. Two of the four candidates were elected outright, but the voting resulted in a tie between me and Dick! Much to my surprise, after a quick run-off election, I was elected to my first term as a Board member by one vote. After the meeting, Dick greeted me with his congratulations and support, and I thanked him for his conciliation. Looking back on the incident today, I believe our decade long friendship began at that point. Naturally, this story has a happy ending for Dick. He joined the Board, by unanimous election of the membership in May 1983, just one year after me. Later, he served as Vice-President of the Society from 1985 through 1988, while I performed the duties of President during that same time period. He succeeded me as President in 1988, serving in that capacity until his untimely death on July 4. Dick was the only person in the 61 year history of the Society to

hold the office that long. Just after his election as President we shared a laugh about that 1982 election outcome, and the fact that he was "my" Vice-President. "Remember Dan", he said, "I'm always just one step behind you!" The structure of volunteer organizations like the M.A.S. often rests on the shoulders of human "pillars"; people who are always there to support it and take good care of it. Dick was certainly a pillar of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society. He truly loved the M.A.S. and his name became synonymous with it.

As I write this, I'm very saddened to reflect on the sudden loss of a good friend, confidant, and loyal fellow member of the Society. I was away on vacation in California at the time of his death and therefore was not able to attend his visitation or funeral. Thanks to Wanda Berner, the news that Dick was gone caught up with me on the morning of July 7. My last conversation with Dick occurred on July 1, just before I left for my trip. As usual it was a telephone conversation about "MAS business", something that had become very common between the two of us over the last eight years. He joked several years ago that our conversations had become so frequent he had to install a separate phone line and answering machine in his home just to handle them!

In addition to serving as a Board member and officer for over 10 years, Dick was responsible for keeping the Society's membership roster updated. Each month since 1984 M.A.S. newsletters have arrived at members homes with mailing labels produced from the membership list Dick maintained. He provided "hard" copies of the membership list for printing and distribution to everyone at membership meetings and made a number of refinements in the roster to make it more useful. Today, there are many members who could perform this service. Ten years ago, Dick had one of the few personal computer systems owned by a M.A.S. member. What's more is he knew how to use it to the benefit of the M.A.S. He was really responsible for bringing many members, and other amateurs around the U.S., into the "computer age".

Dick served on a number of committees for the M.A.S. including the ALCON '84 committee that planned the last Astronomical League national convention held here, as well as the

46th NCRA Convention committee last year. He was a veritable fixture at the Observatory during Open House season — so much so that some visitors would ask me at the gate “is the doctor with the orange telescope available to show me _____ tonight” referring of course to Dick and his world-famous Celestron Eight.

His real passion in amateur astronomy, I think, revolved around three areas, of which it would be difficult to rate them in any type of ascension:

One was the annual M.A.S. camping trips. Dick wouldn't plan his year until he knew when those camping trips were scheduled. And while I've never been an active participant in these events myself, other members who have been through the years will surely miss his participation. I know he was often one of the first to arrive at Greenbush, and later Wild Cat Mountain, and was always there to greet and direct other M.A.S. members as they came. Even though I have rarely attended one, I just can't imagine a M.A.S. camping trip without him. Often times I'd call him a day or two after a camping trip to see how everything went. I can't recall a single instance when he didn't report that “a good time had been had by all” (himself in particular) even if there had been clouds that weekend. Especially good viewing nights were rated by Dick as “SUPERLATIVE!”, an adjective one could just as easily use to describe his enthusiasm for M.A.S. camping trips!

Another great event for Dick every year was Astrofest. He began attending in 1981, just two years after the first one, and never missed one after that. In the last few years he and I had a sort of race to see who could find the best route from Milwaukee and get there first. I finally beat him last year, by about 15 minutes. On Friday evening before dark and most of Saturday, Dick would sit in a chair on the observing field and pass the time catching up on news with his many friends around the region. After dusk, his 'scope was always set up nearby, focused on some deep sky object or planet for anyone who passed by to peek at. He commented to me more than once that he truly enjoyed the camaraderie at Astrofest nearly as much as at the M.A.S. camping trips. It was his idea of a perfect weekend.

Equally as important to him were the relationships he developed

through the Astronomy Forum on the CompuServe computer network. His trademark style and wit will be greatly missed on the “Board” as much as anywhere else. Dick was a pioneer in the development of the Astroforum, starting in the days when astronomy was just a subtopic of the Space Sciences Forum. As message traffic about astronomy grew the decision was made to create a bulletin board devoted specifically to the subject, and the Astroforum was born. More than almost anyone else, Dick understood the nuances of obtaining information from the labyrinth of the CompuServe network. He was an expert at using the various electronic libraries containing computer programs and files of all sorts for all personal computer makes. He wrote many programs and provided files pertaining to astrocomputing for the Apple II family of machines. It would be impossible to count the times he was the first to greet new and timid users, often answering the same questions again and again with his customary enthusiasm and patience as the forum grew. He was truly the patriarch of the system. While he was particularly active in leading “electronic” discussions on the Astroforum, he routinely visited the Apple User, Genealogy, Medical, and Cancer Forums as well. One of his favorite activities was the Sunday night “CO” or live on-line conference conducted between 8:30 and 9:30 on the Astroforum by J. Kelly Beatty from Sky and Telescope. It is a difficult realization that Dick's keyboard has fallen silent, and life on the Astroforum just won't be the same without him.

By profession Dick was a physician. For many years he studied the physical and psychological consequences of addictions, particularly that of cocaine. He was fascinated by this subject and became a leading national expert on treating cocaine addiction with the administration of methadone. Since drug abuse affects the addict and their family and friends alike, I have often wondered how many lives Dick actually affected with his treatment program. I always found his encyclopedic knowledge of drugs, both legal and illicit, quite amazing.

Like other members of the M.A.S., I'll remember Dick's participation and support of activities the most. We traveled together to two national

League conventions: Council Bluffs, Iowa in 1988 and St. Louis in 1990. He attended nearly all the regional conventions held between 1982 and last year. Dick attended almost all M.A.S. field trips, annual dinners, and First Wednesday meetings. He tried his hand at a few occultation outings, traveled with us to Mexico for the “Big One” in 1991, and he was a Keyholder at the Observatory. Most often, if the M.A.S. was sponsoring an event, Dick was sure to be there.

It will be no great surprise to most who read this that I possess some strong opinions about how the M.A.S. should be run. Dick shared many of these same opinions to varying degrees. Occasionally I just outright disagreed with the way he was handling something. While Dick was more passive in his attitude, preferring to allow events to evolve at a natural pace, I was much more impatient to see results and tried to personally influence events to achieve a certain end. Sometimes I just couldn't understand why he didn't see things the way I did. Looking back now, I realize that we really both had the same goal in mind. Though we had our share of disputes, we always remained friends. Looking back now, my disagreements with him just don't seem very important any more. It really doesn't matter who won that election in 1982!

Like the death of any family member, it will take a while for Dick's passing to sink in with me. Some day, I'll look out over a crowd at an Open House, and he won't be there like he always was, just off the southwest corner of the 26" building at the Observatory, showing off Saturn or something to a visitor. What a weird experience that will be! He won't be there to share a lazy Saturday afternoon of chit-chat at Astrofest, or take part in a discussion at the Ground Round after a Friday night M.A.S. meeting. Those stellar observing nights at Greenbush won't be quite as superlative. CompuServe won't be quite as much fun. Nothing he was involved in will be quite the same as it was before. Sure, life and the M.A.S. will go on, but neither will be quite the same for me and many others without Dick Wiesen.

Good-bye old friend, we're sure gonna miss you.

Dan Koehler

This section was compiled by our librarian and historian, Sally Waraczynski.

A brief history of Dick Wiesen's ("Doc") involvement in MAS:

Joined MAS in 1981
Elected to the Board of Directors in 1983
Re-elected to Board and elected vice president 1986
Elected President May 1988
Served as ex-officio president, June 1989-April, 1993
Elected to Board and re-elected president May, 1993
Since 1987, gave the Meteor talk at Open Houses

An abbreviated list of events during the period of Doc's presidency

- 8/87 Dick co-authored (with Gerry Samolyk) an article in the Reflector about MAS observations of the Pleiades occultations (which continued through his term)
- 9/88 Mars perihelion opposition
- 1/89 Begin meetings at Helen Carey Day Hospital
- 6/89 New eyepieces for A & B scopes, new roof on A.
- 8/89 Total lunar eclipse drew much press coverage; slide collection upgraded; Voyager at Neptune
- 9/89 Special multimedia program by J.C. High Eagle; McNeely & Gill take on Focal Point
- 10/89 Galileo launched; opened money market savings account
- 5/90 Doc does Channel 12 remote weather broadcast and interview in big dome
- 6/90 Hubble Trouble
- 8/90 LeRoy Simandl passed away; Magellan launched; Comet Levy 1990c featured at Greenbush campout
- 9/90 Saturn's white spot returns; new garage constructed
- 11/90 Doc produces new roster format with offices and duties
- 2/91 Outreach and Observatory Committees formed
- 5/91 Preparations begin for '92 convention: new roof on big dome; painting
- 7/91 THE BIG ONE! Doc and large MAS contingent travel to Baja Sur for total solar eclipse
- 8/91 Assist Yerkes with CARA grant project
- 11/91 Spectacular aurora
- 3/92 Articles of Organization amended for updated tax exempt status
- 4/92 Hosted NCRAL at Country Inn - Doc on planning committee
- 6/92 Insurance coverage updated
- 7/92 Magazine subscriptions decoupled from membership
- 8/92 New tool shed replaces old garage
- 9/92 New-member packets, contact person, logo pins; Max Aperture
- 10/92 Borchardt/Berner video tour of observatory; Harald Schenk selected to use HST
- 11/92 "First Annual" chili dump
- 12/92 Report of MAS members appearing with WAS on Viacom/Warner cable
- 4/93 Supernova 1993-J in M81
- 5/93 Jim Toeller elected Founder Member
- 6/93 Request to New Berlin to reclassify observatory property

*A heartfelt "Thank You" to all contributors
(members and non-members) who have made a donation
to the Richard Wiesen Memorial Fund.*

The MAS Board voted unanimously on July 12 to use the funds (and provide additional money if necessary) to purchase a large Dobsonian Telescope in memory of Dick, to be used at campouts and Open Houses.

If you would like to make a contribution to the fund, make a check payable to the Milwaukee Astronomical Society and forward it to Marty Brunet, Treasurer, 2329 Hughes Lane, Waukesha, WI 53188.