

Astronomy Delight!

by Ed and Susan Forrest

Retirement and Amateur Astronomy

Recently I was reading an article about the challenges people who are nearing retirement face in today's world. Of course there are the obvious things that might worry those who are soon to leave the workforce such as financial, security, and health concerns, but one often overlooked aspect of retirement is the ability to stay mentally fit. Of course many folks who retire travel often or visit children and grandchildren and receive considerable mental stimulation in doing so, (since few children mature before the age of about 40) while other people resort to outdoor activities, get involved in their communities, or attempt to check off the "yet to do's" of their lifelong "bucket lists". All of these things and activities are great for those who have planned ahead and offer a suitable degree of mental stimulation as many of them are already familiar to those nearing retirement. But how many people who retire

really increase their mental ability as they get older by attempting to learn something entirely different? Sure, learning to golf fits the bill to some degree, as does learning to cook Thai food while nude, or practice surgery on a friend, but none of these activities can exercise or expand the body, mind, and soul as much as embracing the hobby of amateur astronomy. For example.

The philosopher Plato said in 400 BC that "Astronomy compels the soul to look upwards and leads off from this world to another". What a fantastic description of the ability of the human mind to expand beyond the confines of earth. Astronomy itself is within the human soul as since the dawn of mankind humans have gazed upwards at the sky and wondered about the stars above. The hobby of amateur astronomy allows not only people nearing retirement age, but people both young and old the ability to exercise and

nurture the human minds need for knowledge. It is a proven fact that mental stimulation as we age is vital to helping ward off such afflictions as Alzheimer's disease and dementia, and best of all, contrary to popular belief, (and the advent of such fantastic astronomy shows as "The Universe" now shown on the Science Channel) you do not have to be an Einstein or look or

Tele Vue telescope.



act like a geek to enjoy the hobby of amateur astronomy!

It's easy to begin a fun and lifelong journey of discovery in amateur astronomy. First and foremost, go outside at night and look at the night sky. Forget the telescopes, binoculars, looking for planets, constellations, stars, and the like and just gaze at the stars above. Look in all directions. Look for different colors, and patterns, and perhaps you may even see a meteor flash across the sky. But above all realize that much of what you are looking at has been there for literally billions of years and has been gazed upon in wonder and awe by the ancient people since the dawn of man. Realize that the distances to those points of light and diamonds in the sky are, and forever will be incomprehensible to the human mind. Yet realize that you are connected to all that you see above and all that exists throughout the entire universe. The iron and oxygen in your blood, the calcium in your bones, the phosphorus and all the chemicals that make up your body at one time all came from the fiery death cauldrons of

distant supernovas throughout the universe. Once you look above and silently wonder, you are on your way to a fantastic journey.

Spend some time in a good book store (forget the internet for now) and browse the astronomy book section. There are many great books on stargazing for beginners. I personally enjoy and recommend the simple field guides to the stars and books on the basics of astronomy to beginners as many of the other books are crammed with far too much information and silly, miniscule size star maps that are useless to a beginner under a dark sky at night. Get a little basic knowledge about the sky and each night that you gaze at the star filled sky you will yearn for more and more knowledge about what you are seeing. Then it's time to consider the purchase of binoculars or a telescope.

It doesn't matter if you are in a wheelchair, lost a limb, take tons of medications for a variety of ailments, can't sit or stand for long periods, or feel that you just can't learn at your age, I guarantee the night sky

awaits you. It's free, ever changing, and delightful. Now that you have the time to enjoy it, do it!

Next month I will suggest more ways to enjoy the night sky for beginners and provide some words of wit and wisdom regarding purchasing binoculars and telescopes, along with a variety of affordable "neat" stuff to really enjoy the hobby.

P.S. Astronomy Delight! will be at the Statsburg library on July 28th giving an astronomy program for beginners!

Astronomy Delight! Headquartered in Hyde Park, N.Y. welcomes your questions and comments regarding this column and offers day and night after-school enrichment programs, classroom events, scouts, camps, group lectures, individual astronomy programs, and observation courses for families, parents, and children of all ages throughout the country and Tri-state NY area. FRANCHISE INQUIRYS ARE WELCOME
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