

Saskatoon Skies

The Newsletter of the Saskatoon Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

Vol 40, No. 8

August 2009

It's Our 40th Anniversary!



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RASC Saskatoon Centre 1969-2009

President's Message

by Barb Wright

As this year's Saskatoon Centre President and also Chair of the 2009 RASC General Assembly, I'd like to offer everyone a hearty Saskatchewan welcome. I hope you'll enjoy reading this special 40th anniversary issue of our newsletter and learning more about our Centre and its members, past and present.



I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone, past and present, for your work on behalf of the Centre.

The year 2009 is definitely turning out to be a good one for the Saskatoon Centre. We've had the chance to host several highly successful public events in connection with the International Year of Astronomy; we've had the

Since joining the Saskatoon Centre in 1997, I've been pleased to have the chance to be part of so many great Centre events and programs that I've lost count....My definite favourite is our annual Saskatchewan Summer Star Party (SSSP).

thrill of getting our new 16" telescope up and running at the Observatory; we're gearing up for our first-ever major art gallery exhibit, "Celebrating the Night Sky"; and, of course, we're all ready to have a blast at the 2009 General Assembly after several years of planning and preparing.

Over our 40-year history, our Centre has many accomplishments to be proud of, including our joint arrangement with the University of Saskatchewan to operate the Sleaford Observatory, our many public education activities, outstanding successes on the Light Pollution Abatement front, our great Website, publishing *Saskatoon Skies*, and of course, the SSSP. Each of these has grown and thrived through the dedicated efforts of dozens of members over the years.

All in all, a terrific 40th anniversary year by any reckoning. May the next 40 years bring many more good times, good friends, and great developments for our Centre! I'm especially looking forward to seeing our plans to expand the Sleaford Observatory site come to fruition someday soon.

Front Cover Montage

The People in the Pics:

Top Row (L-R): Les Dickson, Lucien Kemble, Jim Young, Chris Martin, Marianne & Bill Hydomako

2nd Row (L-R): Garry Stone (with Buzzard Coulee meteorite), Bruce Brandell, Ron Waldron, Yannis Pahatourogrou & Stan Shadick (with 16" Centre scope)

3rd Row: Kathleen Houston & Rick Huziak (with Buzzard Coulee meteorite)

Bottom Row: Les & Ellen Dickson, Bev & Darrell Chatfield, Andrew Krochko

Front Cover Photos Provided by:

Top Row (L-R): Ellen Dickson, Tenho Tuomi, Ellen Dickson, & Marianne Hydomako

2nd Row (L-R): Tenho Tuomi (1st 3) & Ellen Dickson

3rd Row: Rick Huziak

Bottom Row: Ellen Dickson

Photo on top of this page by Jeff Swick

Newsletter Editors – Christine Kulyk & Tenho Tuomi

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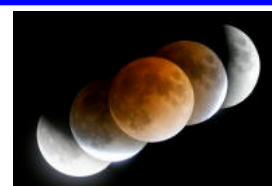
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RASC CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug 13-16	RASC General Assembly & SSSP – Cypress Hills	Barb Wright	249-1990
Aug 21	Observers Group – 8:00 pm, Sleaford Observatory	Larry Scott	934-5801
Aug 21-23	Spruce Woods Star Party – Spruce Woods Park, MB	http://winnipeg.rasc.ca/	
Sep 3	Opening Reception for “Celebrating the Night Sky” Exhibit - 7:00 pm, Frances Morrison Library Gallery	Kathleen Houston	665-3392
Sep 15-20	Northern Prairie Starfest – Black Nugget Lake, AB	http://www.edmontonrasc.com/nps.html	
Sep 18	Observers Group – 7:30 pm, Sleaford Observatory	Larry Scott	934-5801
Sep 19-20	Alberta Star Party - Starland Recreation Area, AB	http://calgary.rasc.ca/asp2009.htm	
Sep 21	RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm, 175 Physics, U of S	Barb Wright	249-1990
Sep 21	RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm, 175 Physics, U of S	Barb Wright	249-1990
Oct 19	RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm, 175 Physics, U of S	Barb Wright	249-1990
Oct 19	RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm, 175 Physics, U of S	Barb Wright	249-1990

Thursday, September 3, 2009 Opening Night Reception for “Celebrating the Night Sky”

an International Year of Astronomy exhibition
hosted by the RASC Saskatoon Centre



Visual and fabric artists, astronomers, writers, and students
share their visual exploration of the night sky experience.

Location: The Gallery, Frances Morrison Library
311 – 23 Street E., Saskatoon, SK



Reception: 7:00-8:30 pm
Drumming and Stargazing:
23 Street East, at the riverfront, **8:30-10:00 pm**

Curator: Kathleen Houston (975-7542)
Website: <http://www.saskatoonlibrary.ca>



Group photo from the 2004 SSSP

Photo by Ellen Dickson

RASC Saskatoon Centre: 1969–2009

by Christine Kulyk

Back in 1969, two events of special significance for all of our readers transpired. The first, which has been much in the news of late, was the July 20th Moon landing, when human beings first set foot on a world beyond our own — an event of global, and even beyond global, significance. The second, the founding of the RASC Saskatoon Centre, had a more local, yet more immediate, impact for everyone who's been involved with our Centre in some way over the past 40 years.

Those two events, seemingly so disparate, were not unconnected. I was a teenager in Montreal at the time of the Moon landing, and I have vivid memories of what a great time that was for astronomy and its allied space sciences. Public interest and enthusiasm were never greater. What better time to start an astronomy club?

Such was surely in the mind of our Centre's founding father, Ed Kennedy, when he urged Saskatoon-area astronomy enthusiasts to form an RASC Centre in 1969. They began with 33 members, holding their first meeting on November 17, 1969, in the Observatory on the University of Saskatchewan campus. John Edward (Ed) Kennedy, a U of S Physics prof, just happened to be the National President of the RASC that year; but the idea of forming a Saskatoon Centre evolved naturally out of what may be called our Centre's prehistory.

Back in 1947, there had been a previous Saskatoon Centre of the RASC, with 35 members. It seems to have fizzled out after just a few years, to be replaced in 1963 with an independent club, the Saskatoon



Saskatoon Skies Co-Editor
Christine Kulyk at an
Astronomy Day table, 2007
Photo by Tenho Tuomi



Saskatoon Skies Co-Editor
Tenho Tuomi and Past
President Garry Stone hard at
work on Centre projects
Photo by Tenho Tuomi



Dean Sproull, a member from
Lloydminster, brought his 11"
SCT to Saskatoon Astronomy
Week in April 2009
Photo by Jeff Swick

Astronomical Society. That, in turn, was supplanted in 1969 by the current RASC Saskatoon Centre.

Our Centre now has 70 members, its own Observatory, and an annual Star Party that is in its 13th year. Some of our members have been with our group since the late 1970s. Our longest-standing member is Merlyn Melby, who joined in 1972 and was very active in many Centre programs over the years, including serving a term as newsletter editor.

Our newsletter is also celebrating its 40th anniversary, although its original name was not *Saskatoon Skies*, but the more prosaic *NEWS LETTER*. Originally produced with a spirit duplicator and stencils, it evolved by 1977 into a glossy-covered 29-page magazine with the new name *Saskatoon Skies*.

Co-Editor Tenho Tuomi, who has worked on *Saskatoon Skies* for the past six years, is an avid astrophotographer who lives in Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan, and often takes his telescopes to community programs in that area. The other Co-Editor is Christine Kulyk (me). I began working on the newsletter in May 2008. My "day job" is as a freelance writer and editor specializing in science subjects — I'm the Assistant Editor of *SkyNews* magazine, and I've also been on the editorial team of several popular astronomy books.

Publishing has always been an important component of Saskatoon Centre programs. Not only has our Centre produced a newsletter on a more-or-less monthly basis for 40 years, it also published an award-winning star atlas in 1977, using

astrophotos by our own members. We now have a fine Website where we make our newsletter available to the general public and carry tons of useful resources for our members, thanks mainly to the efforts of our Webmaster Gordon Sarty.

Two of our Centre's strongest traditions have always been a commitment to public education activities and a love of star parties. In its earliest years, the Saskatoon Centre sponsored regular astronomy classes at the Campus Observatory, with sessions on telescope-making, identifying planets and constellations, telescope operation, and observing tips.

That tradition continues, as several of our members are intensely involved on an ongoing basis in communicating astronomy to the public — including Ron “The Starman” Waldron, Stan Shadick (author of the award-winning *Skywatcher's Calendar*), Rick Huziak, and Mike Clancy, to name only a few. In 1977, Saskatoon Centre members began mounting a display at the yearly Hobby Show, where huge crowds come out to see our telescopes and take away copies of our information materials. Since 1981, our Centre has put a major focus on Astronomy Week, with many members coming out to set up displays in places like a local mall, community centre, or the Farmer's Market, plus public observing sessions at an outdoor venue.

One of our fondest traditions, star parties, began as far back as 1973, with an annual Wiener Roast Picnic & Star Outing at Diefenbaker Park that included a baseball game as well as stargazing. Then there was the Annual Star Outing at the Aucklands' farm 26 miles south of Saskatoon. Our star party fever truly took off in 1997, with the first Saskatchewan Summer Star Party at Cypress Hills park.

One of our founding fathers, Gordon N. Patterson, was an avid astrophotographer who became a driving force

behind building the Centre's first dark-site observatory at the Rystrom farm in 1978. He was also the driving force behind hosting our first RASC national General Assembly, in 1982. It was held on the U of S campus, and according to Peter Broughton in his book *Looking Up: A History of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, at the 1982 Saskatoon GA, “fun and camaraderie were never higher.”

It's been 27 years since that event, and here we are once again hosting an RASC GA, but with a difference. We've combined the star party experience with the traditional GA features, hoping to give our participants the best of both worlds.

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Al Hartridge, Graham Hartridge, Darrell Chatfield, and Rick Huziak at the 2004 Hobby Show

Photo by Tenho Tuomi

The Sleaford Observatory

Located about 35 minutes' drive from Saskatoon, the Saskatoon Centre's observatory shares its site with facilities operated by the University of Saskatchewan. Our club has a 16" Meade LX-200, an 8" Celestron, and a 12.5" Dobsonian telescope at the site. A number of smaller telescopes are also available for use at the observatory or for loan to members at a nominal fee. We also have a large, heated warmup shelter to enable comfortable year-round observing. Each fall, we host an Open House where the public is invited to enjoy a night of observing at Sleaford.

The Sleaford Observatory Site by Darrell Chatfield

Many of us have come to appreciate the wonderful dark skies of the RASC Saskatoon and University of Saskatchewan dark site known as Sleaford. However, not many of us know the history of this special piece of land.

The Sleaford site is located 65 kilometres east of Saskatoon. It was chosen 12 years ago after extensive searching of all possible sites by volunteers of the RASC and University of Saskatchewan. This area met all of the criteria to satisfy the need for a dark sky for future users. Our previous site, known as Rystrom's, was located south of Saskatoon on private farmland, just east of Grasswood Esso. RASC members used that site for about 20 years, but it soon succumbed to problems with light pollution from the growing city.

The University of Saskatchewan bought the three-acre parcel of land at Sleaford in the summer of 1997, with the idea of soon having their own observatory there for use by astronomy students. It was also designed to



Sleaford Observatory site, with our Centre's dome and warmup shelter on the left

Photo by Tenho Tuomi



All-night 2005 Messier Marathon at Sleaford

Photo by Tenho Tuomi

accommodate the RASC buildings from the Rystrom site.

Therefore, in October 1997, members of the club had the warmup shelter from Rystrom's farm moved to the new Sleaford site after much preparation. It was quite a sight to see the clubhouse moving down grid roads on the back of a flatbed truck! News media were at the new site ready to record and televise the epic move.

In November, underground wiring was added. Also in that same year, the University of Saskatchewan had their own metal-clad building put on the site just south of the warmup shelter. This large building has the added feature of a roll-off roof, which allows the four permanently mounted telescopes to be used by university students.

In the fall of 1999, the club decided it was necessary to add on to the warmup shelter to accommodate increasing numbers of site users. So the whole north section was enlarged to allow for a larger club area and indoor toilet facilities.

All of this work and expansion has allowed Sleaford to be used by many RASC members and U of S students alike. Hundreds of people from the general public have also enjoyed coming to the Open Houses that are cosponsored by both groups.

What's in a Name?

The Sleaford name has a long history. It comes from the English town of Sleaford, Lincolnshire. In 852 AD, the name first appeared as *Sliofofd*. Then in the Domesday Book of 1086, the village was given the name *Eslaforde*, from the old English "ēsla + forde," meaning "ford over a muddy river stream." (In Lincolnshire, the stream is now known as the River

Slea.) Sleaford, UK, is chiefly known as an agricultural town, with 14,500 people and a few famous seed companies headquartered there.

Coming to Saskatchewan:

In 1906, a fellow by the name of James Watson Beebe and his family moved to Canada from Sleaford, England. He farmed in the Colonsay area for many years. In 1913, a school was built near the Beebe homestead. Named Sleaford School after James's hometown, the school was to become the heart of many community activities.



Treasurer Norma Jensen & Fundraising Coordinator Darrell Chatfield ran a raffle to raise funds for the Sleaford expansion project

Photo by Tenho Tuomi

The Sleaford Schoolhouse, which was ordered from the Eaton's catalogue, almost burned down in the 1920s. A fire, set by boys playing with matches across the road, travelled for two miles before it was stopped!

The original one-room Sleaford Schoolhouse still remains on the Sleaford Observatory grounds. It's a piece of Saskatchewan history that seems fitting, as to this day, the Sleaford site is still engaged as a teaching and educational tool for all those who come there!

Amateur Telescope Making in the Saskatoon Centre

by Gordon Sarty

The earliest instance of amateur telescope making (ATM) activity in our Centre, to my knowledge, involved a 1982 scheme by Gordon Patterson and Jim Young to build a 16" telescope. The scheme came to life when Jim Young purchased the 16" mirror blank.

It was a high-tech mirror blank because of its unusual shape: a cone, thicker in the middle than at the edges. And a hole was partly cut through the back — to be removed when the mirror was finished. The telescope envisaged was a Cassegrain design with a front end that could be swapped out to convert the telescope to a Newtonian. The Cassegrain design meant there had to be a hole in the middle of the mirror for light to go through to the eyepiece: thus, the partially cut hole in the blank.

The blank mirror had to be ground and polished before it was useful. Doug Miller, an optical engineer, led that effort, along with the labour of Mike Wesolowski, Rick Huziak, and myself. The mirror was brought to the polishing stage and left for a number of years

before it was picked up again by Bill Hydromako and Rick. I again joined Bill and Rick in Bill's basement workshop to polish the mirror.

To build up our confidence, we worked on an 8" mirror first and pretty much finished it. (I don't know what became of that smaller mirror.) We finished the polishing and then figured and tested the 16" mirror. Bill and Rick finally completely cut out the hole in the middle. Bill also worked with Perry Balon at the University Physics Machine Shop to build the mount and optical support pieces like the tube and focuser. As of today, those pieces are in the schoolhouse at the Sleaford Observatory site waiting to be turned into a telescope. The mirror also waits, unsilvered, for its first light. But the mirror makers learned much of what they know about ATM from working on the "sixteen," and they have gone on to make very functional telescopes.



Gordon Sarty took his 8" scope to the Mt. Kobau Star Party

Photo courtesy of Gordon Sarty

Before, and since, getting involved with the 16" telescope project, Rick Huziak worked on several mirrors of his own — 4.25", 6", 10", and 12". The 4.25" mirror made it into a telescope, and so did the 6": into Rick's solar telescope.

Doug Miller made a 10" telescope using a commercially made mirror. Rick bought that 10" telescope and still uses it today.

I had an 8" mirror kit that I bought when I was 12 years old. The experience and knowledge I got working with Rick and Bill finally motivated me to finish the mirror when I was 32. Never give up! I still use that telescope and have since built an 18" telescope that might be just a little too big to move around conveniently. It's an f5, and I'm watching the new trend of large f3 telescopes that are now starting to show up at star parties.

I've also built a pair of all-sky cameras to watch for fireballs. One of those cameras videoed the Buzzard Coulee fireball when it flashed by on Saskatoon's horizon, and they both still look for fireballs automatically under computer guidance.

Other people in the Saskatoon Centre have also built telescopes. One was Ken Nosgaard, who brought mirror-making knowledge to Saskatoon from the

Winnipeg Centre. Ken liked to build mirror grinding and polishing machines.



Rick Huziak with his 10" "Cloud Scope" (made by Doug Miller)
Photo by Gordon Sarty

A couple of people in our Centre have built "Stargazer Steve" kit telescopes. Wade Selvig built a 6" version, and Sandy Ferguson built a 4.25" version with her Saskatoon Centre Youth Group.

Jeff Vollmer told me that he made a 6" refractor about three years ago out of lenses and mechanical parts he found at Rose's Auction in Saskatoon. It took him only a few weekends to build, and Jeff reports good views of the Moon, Jupiter, and Saturn with it. Another fellow I remember is Garry Brett, who made small

telescopes and spent a fair amount of effort making them quite nice to look at.

Speaking from my own experience, there is nothing like looking at the stars with your own homemade telescope. In fact, professional telescopes aside, I've only ever used telescopes I've made myself. I guess we ATMers are like Galileo that way. He had to make his telescopes too.

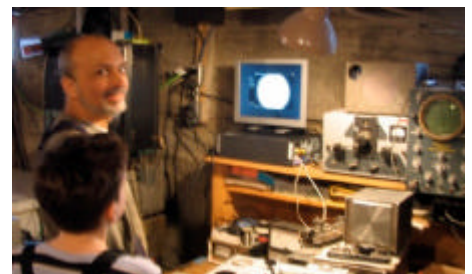
An All-Sky Fireball Camera Setup by Tenho Tuomi



Gordon Sarty has been operating all-sky fireball cameras from the roof of the Physics Building on the University of Saskatchewan campus in Saskatoon. On February 16, 2009, he moved one of the cameras to the roof of our house to work together with his camera in Saskatoon to track bright meteors.

The computer went into my basement to join the magnetometers, weather computers, and amateur radio equipment already there. It took a

couple of days' work to get all the Internet connections working. On March 1, Gordon reported the first simultaneous detection from the two cameras.



Left - Gordon's son Dominic supervises the installation of a fireball camera on Tenho's roof
Right - Gordon Sarty in computer heaven

Photos by Tenho Tuomi



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The History of the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party

by Les Dickson
with additional material by Rick Huziak

The Saskatchewan Summer Star Party (SSSP) has been a labour of love for over 12 years for the members of the Saskatoon and Regina Centres of the RASC. Each year, over 200 people have met at the Centre Block of the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park and Dark Sky Preserve to socialize and celebrate the night sky in one of the best observing venues in the country.

How It Began:

In the May 1996 issue of *Saskatoon Skies*, Erich Keser suggested that the Saskatoon Centre should do a joint star party with Regina at Cypress Hills. Our Centre was doing a lot of local star parties at this time — a dozen or more were held around Saskatoon and in the local provincial parks. In 1996, Richard Huziak was President of the Saskatoon Centre. Erich Keser was Vice-President and would assume the Presidency in the fall of 1997.

Some of Saskatoon Centre's executive officers attended a June 1996 meeting of the Regina Centre, where Ross Parker was President. At that meeting, they discussed participation in a Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, exploratory for July 1996, then official for July 1997.

Somewhere between 19 to 23 members of the Saskatoon and Regina Centres and their families attended the exploratory party July 12-14, 1996. Very favourable reviews of the star party and of the Cypress Hills as a viewing site appeared in our September 1996 newsletter.

By that time, organization for the July 1997 SSSP had proceeded at top speed. The organizing committee was led by Erich and included Rick Huziak, Sandy Ferguson, Kim and Debbie Mysyk, David Cornish,



Erich Keser, an SSSP founder
Photo by Ellen Dickson



Garry Stone with handcrafted wooden scopes at SSSP 2007
Photo by Tenho Tuomi

Darrell Chatfield, Kirt Headley, Pat Lafournaise, Al Hartridge, Bob Christie, Brian Friesen, and others. The team from Regina was Ross Parker, Darcy Kozoriz, and Steve Szuta.

In April 1997, the first official SSSP Committee was formed with Erich as the Chair. The first official SSSP was held July 4-7, 1997, with 198 registered attenders from as far away as Ottawa, Vancouver Island, and Flagstaff, Arizona.

How It's Grown:

SSSP has become one of the largest star parties in western Canada. Not only has it hosted many well-known amateur and professional astronomers as featured speakers, but it has been the focus of many newsworthy events.

In 1997, Father Luc Kemble gave the keynote presentation. Fr. Luc, aka "Lamplighter," was well-known to amateur astronomers as a dedicated observer of galaxies and discoverer of Kemble's Cascade, a 2-degree chain of stars in the constellation

Camelopardalis, who loved to share his appreciation for the night sky with others. A member of the Regina Centre, Fr. Kemble died in February 1999; in his honour, SSSP founded the Fr. Lucien Kemble Memorial Lecture, to be delivered by a featured invited speaker each year.

In 2001, when I was SSSP Chair, the SSSP and CHIPP became the focus of intense media attention when Vance Petriew of Regina discovered a comet (P/2001/Q2 Petriew), the first comet discovered at a star party in Canada. Not only did Vance achieve the coveted honour of having a comet named after him, he also won the Starfest Bring Home the Bacon Award! In 2002, a marker commemorating Vance's comet

discovery was placed at the entrance to the Meadows Campground.

In 2004, after many months of hard work by many RASC members, including Rick Huziak of Saskatoon, Vance Petriew of Regina, and Bob King of Calgary, along with park Manager Brad Mason of CHIPP, a declaration making the Centre Block of CHIPP a Dark Sky Preserve was signed during the SSSP.

It did not stop there: later that year, on September 28, 2004, a declaration was signed making the Cypress Hills Centre Block, West Block, Elkwater, and Fort Walsh National Historic Site part of a unified Cypress Hills Dark Sky Preserve. For these pioneering efforts, at the 2005 SSSP, the RASC awarded the National Light Pollution Abatement Award to representatives of Saskatchewan Parks, Alberta Community Development, and Parks Canada. At the ceremony, CHIPP Manager Brad Mason recognized the efforts of the RASC to bring the Dark Sky Preserve about by giving awards of appreciation to Rick Huziak, Vance Petriew, and Bob King.

GA/SSSP 2009:

In 2007, the Saskatoon Centre decided to present a proposal to the RASC National Council to host the 2009 General Assembly (GA) in conjunction with SSSP 2009. It was felt that having a GA in a Dark Sky Preserve was an appropriate way for the RASC to celebrate IYA 2009 and recognize the importance of dark skies for everyone. The Saskatoon Centre, with help from members of the Regina Centre, have organized a unique event that we hope will leave many fond memories with all who attend.



Jeff Swick setting up his scope at SSSP 2007

Photo by Tenho Tuomi



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Benefits of Membership in the Saskatoon Centre

- knowledgeable & friendly amateur astronomers
- use of the Sleaford Observatory
- use of the U of S Observatory (after training)
- Saskatoon Skies Newsletter
- Observer's Handbook
- The Journal of the RASC (electronic format)
- SkyNews Magazine (bimonthly)
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Secretary – Al Hartridge, 373-0034
Vice-President – Jeff Swick, 373-3902
Treasurer – Norma Jensen, 244-7360

Current Saskatoon Centre Council Members

Barb Wright: President & SSSP Coordinator
Jeff Swick: Vice President
Al Hartridge: Secretary
Norma Jensen: Treasurer
Garry Stone: Past President
Christine Kulyk & Tenho Tuomi: Newsletter Co-Editors
Les Dickson: National Council Rep
Patricia Gakis: Events Coordinator
Darrell Chatfield: Fundraising Coordinator, Sleaford Site

Coordinator, & Librarian
Mark de Jong: Membership Coordinator
Larry Scott: Observing Coordinator
Jim Young: Councillor-at-large
George Charpentier: Centre Photographer/Archivist
Graham Hartridge: Meeting Room Coordinator
James Gorkoff: New & Distant Members Coordinator
Bruce Brandell: Publications Sales Coordinator
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*Photo by
Jeff Swick*