

2008 Award Citations

Chant Medal, to Dr. Geoff Gaherty (Toronto Centre and Montreal Centre)

Born in 1941, Dr. Geoff Gaherty saw a partial solar eclipse on 1946-11-23 from the family's front yard and became a self-professed amateur astronomer in 1957. Beginning with half of a pair of binoculars and then an Edmund Palomar Jr. 11-cm reflector, Geoff scanned the skies as a teenager and began an observing log to document the development of his familiarity with the night sky. As a member of the Society's Montréal Centre, he was fourth to earn the legendary Messier Certificate. Eventually, Geoff mastered every aspect of the traditional observer's repertoire, including sketching lunar scenes and the disk of Mars. During the 1960s Gaherty chaired the Montréal Centre's Lunar Observation programme. In this way, he inspired many members to observe the Moon at a critical time just before the manned landings began. Geoff also participated in Montréal Centre's ambitious program to observe the total solar eclipse of 1963-07-20.

A career built on his B.Sc. from McGill University (1964), M.A. and then Ph.D. (1970) in anthropology, from University of Toronto, precipitated a long hiatus from amateur astronomy. In 1997, Geoff returned with a vengeance, completing the Society's Finest NGC list in March 2001 and the Herschel 400 in April 2006 -- 48 years after his first recorded contribution to that list. He worked his way through the Astronomical League's Double Star Club list. Inspired by fellow Chant Medal winner Richard Huziak, Geoff began observing variable stars and recording his measurements. Another pursuit of Geoff's has been timing central-meridian transits on Jupiter. After years of observing from dark-challenged suburban skies, Geoff moved to a farm near Coldwater, Ontario, in 2005, where the dark skies sing to him. As part of the Toronto Centre's globe-trotting expedition, Geoff observed the total solar eclipse of 2006-03-29 in Libya. Comets that Geoff has seen include Mrkos (1957), Hyakutake (1996), and Hale-Bopp (1997).

He has employed at least 25 different telescopes since his youth, including a 200-mm Cave Newtonian, 150-mm Dobsonian, Jaegers 52-mm f/25 achromatic refractor, Meade 200-mm Schmidt-Cassegrain (one of the first ones made), Celestron CPC 1100 28-cm SCT and a Meade ETX 90 Maksutov-Cassegrain. In recent years, Geoff put some of this aperture under a plastic dome, inside a new SkyPOD at his home. Geoff is an active participant in the amateur astronomical community as a moderator of online discussion groups, and he wrote an online column called "The Sky This Month" for a few years. Since 2006, Geoff has contributed a regular column to the Society's Journal, "Through My Eyepiece." His writing exhibits a thorough but gentle style, almost avuncular. Adding an astronomical item to his professional life, Geoff has also been a consultant for Starry Night Software, and maintains a professional connection to the Royal Ontario Museum.

Whether he is observing the stars of the endless night sky, logging another deep-sky object, testing another new commercial telescope, or writing about his exploits in the pages of the Society's Journal, Geoff Gaherty embodies the life-long commitment of a holder of the Chant Medal, and we are proud to admit him to the exclusive club of worthy recipients as its 28th winner.