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Astrology Dawns As Rising Hobby

By JEANNE MAGLATY

Astrologers don't have to consult the stars before they claim their field is gaining followers faster than ever in the state. Numbers prove it.

One old-timer said 30 years ago she couldn't even mention astrology. Today, it's an over-used opener in singles bars.

Astrology is everywhere. Newspapers, magazines and radio stations carry syndicated sun sign reports. Cruise ships and ski resorts bring astrologers aboard for entertainment. New York Telephone offers customers Jeane Dixon's Horoscopes by Phone. Women's clubs and singles groups hire astrologers for lectures.

An astrology center, called Astrological Institute of Research, opened last month in Hartford. Colleges and adult education programs offer courses in the study of how the heavenly bodies supposedly relate to life and events on earth.

Membership in the Astrological Society of Connecticut is growing. Organization President Alberta Benson said the club has about 100 dues-paying members, up from 60 two years ago.

The organization was founded in 1972 by 10 persons. They took off a weekday afternoon from their regular jobs so they could sign the bylaws at the best time according to astrological calculations.

A western Connecticut chapter of the National Council for Geocosmic Research was formed in June. Its 14 members, who didn't want to travel to New York City and Hartford for chapter meetings, have chosen

Summer Housecleaning

Located at 373 Wethersfield Ave., the seven-room apartment was cleaned, painted and decorated this summer by Lavoie and his wife, Betty. They had limited funds but a lot of love to put into the center, they said.

After the major housework was completed, Lavoie put up astrological posters, painted a zodiac in blue, purple and orange on the vestibule floor and attached signs to various spots to achieve an aura. The symbol of Cancer rests on the refrigerator because Cancer rules the stomach. Leo stands for pride, so that sign went on the bathroom door because people stand in front of the bathroom mirror to primp themselves, Lavoie explained.

The center is conducting two beginners astrology classes, and intermediate, advanced, horary and specialized astrology classes. More than 35 students are enrolled.

Classes are taught by Lavoie and two professional astrologers, Nellie Blakesly of Kensington and Ruth Gerry of Chaplin. Mrs. Gerry is known as the mother of astrology in Connecticut.

Science Or Not

Depending on whom you talk to, astrology, which had its beginning in Babylonia in 2000 B.C., is a science, pseudoscience, astral theology, art, or pure bunk.

Lavoie takes astrology extremely seriously. "I want to prove to the people of Connecticut, astrology is not witchcraft, not black magic. It's a science people have misused for many years," he said.

Alphee Lavoie poses with
Astrological Institute of Research

array of astrology. Although the columns are highly simplistic and purely entertaining, they serve a purpose by exposing astrology to persons who may later become serious students, astrologers say.

Another reason cited for the increased attention is that people are searching for answers about themselves during this Age of Aquarius. The '70s is becoming known as "The Me Decade." Astrology provides people with insight into themselves, its proponents say.

Astrology groups in the state enjoy a great deal of camaraderie although their methods of study and beliefs may differ. Astrologers often refer to their fellow astrologers with praise.

One name heard frequently is Alphee Lavoie of Ellington.

Lavoie, who said the priest told his mother at his christening to give her son a unique first name because he would do something special on Earth, is the founder of the Astrological Institute of Research.

Peterson, associate professor of physics, who teaches astronomy and astrophysics.

Dr. Peterson read a statement signed by 186 leading scientists—18 Nobel prize winners—deploring the rise in popularity of astrology. The statement, "Objections to Astrology," appeared in the September-October, 1975, issue of Humanist magazine. It said astrology has no scientific foundation for its tenants, called astrologers "charlatans," and cautioned the public against following their advice.

Lavoie said he spent 10 years doing research four hours a night and eight hours a day on weekends to prove to himself astrology works. His specialty is horary astrology, which answers individual's particular questions such as when to sign a business contract or marry.

Society Goals

Using astrology to work with children is another goal of the center, Lavoie said. The couple explained, using their son, Jon, 5, as an example. Jon's

charts indicated he would emerge as a personality trait. The Lavoies said they have noticed this already, having been alerted by his chart, and are trying to curb it.

Mrs. Benson, the Astrological Society of Connecticut president, believes astrology can be used to help prevent child abuse. If parents are aware of the time when they are most likely to erupt, they may be able to quell their tempers, she said.

Mrs. Benson said the goals of the ASC are to get a meeting place of their own such as Lavoie's, dispel myths about astrologers and teach the membership about "humanness."

The society meets the third Thursday of the month at the Unitarian Meeting House in Hartford. Their sessions usually consist of a talk by a prominent author or astrologer.

All-day workshops sponsored by the society also attract astrologers. On Sept. 17, 90 persons turned out for a lively session with Noel Tyl, who Mrs. Benson labeled "the movie star of astro-



Richard Landon, first vice president, and Lynn Files, second vice president of the Astrological Society of Connecticut, view books from Ms. File's bookstore on sale at an all-day workshop presented by the society (Courant Photo by Michael McAndrews).

ogers: The society paid \$500 and his travel expenses.

Female Participants

Only 11 participants in the workshop were male. Women greatly outnumber men in astrology. Several astrologers said women enter the field more often because they possess a desirable intuitive quality.

But the stereotype of astrologers as little old ladies running around in sneakers is fading, Mrs. Benson said.

Some astrologers, such as Mrs. Benson who is a palmist, are involved with other studies as well.

The National Council for Geocosmic Research, which consists mostly of astrologers, also investigates the metaphysical fields. The association, which has chapters in western Connecticut and Hartford, was formed to conduct investigations of the interactions between life, the earth and the cosmos.

Conference Scheduled

Maria Sullivan, president of

ter, said some of its members are relatively new to astrology, having studied metaphysical matters in the past.

She said she is continually amazed how the fields overlap. "Astrology is perhaps the most exact and scientific," she said.

Ramona Doten, recording secretary of the Hartford chapter, apologized during an interview that because her Gemini is in the twelfth house she doesn't communicate well, but she passed over literature on the NCGR to explain its purpose.

The chapter is planning a one-day conference Nov. 12 at the downtown YMCA. Topics of discussion are Eclipses and Occultations; Healing With Color, Music and Body Energy; Indications of the Male and Female Principles in Astrology; the Composite Chart; Astrology and the Centers of the Body, and the Mentality of the Horoscope—The Role of Mercury.

Mrs. Doten said the organization deals with more technical matters than the Astrological

chapter. It has been 20 years since a research project started, however.

Life After Death

Most astrologers believe in reincarnation.

Ms. Sullivan said astrology has strengthened her faith in God, adding she goes to Episcopal services every Sunday.

"I'd go so far as to say practically everyone I know who is interested in metaphysics is also a strong believer in God," she said.

The Rev. Edmund Nadolny, communications director of the Archdiocese of Hartford, said, "God gave us a free will, a grace to live freely. To say that another planet or star or horoscope nonsense influences my life, takes away my freedom, dehumanizes me and de-Christianizes me. I don't believe that outside forces control my freedom. God has given me a will. If people spent as much time reading the

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Astrology instructor Nellie Blakesly looks over the application of a guest during open house at Astrological Institute of Research (Courant Photo by Michael McAndrews).

'And a Star To Steer Them By'

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Bible as their horoscope they'd be much better off."

Astrologers, however, say the study is not fatalistic. They say humans "do" create their own destiny.

Few astrologers can make a living from it. Lecturing can bring in the most money. Calculating charts and teaching small classes at home help, too.

Lynn Files of Broad Brook opened Friendship House, an astrological and metaphysical bookstore, one year ago with a business partner, Ginny Cuny. The women sell books through the mail, out of Ms. Files' home, at Lavoie's center and at astrological workshops.

The bookstore, which shares Ms. Files' living room with a wooden pyramid frame, is open 11½ hours a week. Believers in pyramid power sit under the frame in a beanbag chair.

Ms. Files said astrology

teaches people how to use their energy positively. It plays a major rôle in self-awareness, she said.

Capel McCutcheon of Wethersfield has another kind of astrological business. He is the founder of the Astrological Bureau of Ideas.

A former businessman, McCutcheon turned full-time professional astrologer four years ago. He leases time on a computer at Wesleyan University and charges fees to other astrologers to perform computerized calculations. Services available through his "complete service for astrologers" are natal charts, progressions, transits, solar returns and chart comparison.

McCutcheon said about 25 per cent of his personal clients are involved in strictly business matters. For instance, McCutcheon said someone may contact him to ask whether a candidate

for a job looks promising or whether to go into a business partnership.

Irresponsible Users

Practicing astrology is illegal, according to a 1971 state statute. The law apparently goes unenforced.

Astrologers don't force their beliefs on others, but some do misuse astrology, said Lavoie.

"There's a lot of bad astrology. They ruin it for the good ones," said Lavoie. He said he tries to give people direction, not commands.

An astrologer cannot predict whether someone will be hit by a car at a particular moment—that's psychic, Lavoie explained.

One astrologer said she heard of people being charged \$500 for a chart. Lavoie charges \$10-\$25.

A good astrologer wants only to help other human beings, astrologers say.

Life / style

Part E

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BETTY BARRETT



Alphee Lavoie poses with a poster of Leo at the month-old Astro-logical Institute of Research on Wethersfield Avenue.

Courant Color Photo by John