MOON: 90% WAXING GIBBOUS SUNSET:

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS

REMEMBERING TOM GEHRELS (1925-2011)
BY: GOVERT SCHILLING JULY 12, 2011 6
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The first thing I saw when I entered the University of Arizona office of Tom Gehrels last April Dutchman, Gehrels always rode it from his Tucson home to the Lunar and Planetary Laborat



Tom Gehrels joined the University of Arizona in 1961 and became a leading expert on asteroi University of Arizona

The second thing I saw were Indian tapestries and Buddhist artifacts, giving the office a disti Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad, Gehrels spent a few months each year lecturin every day, presumably right up to his peaceful death on July 11th.

The third thing I saw was a frail man with light-blue, watery eyes and a friendly smile. When "Het gaat heel goed!" — "I'm doing very well!" In fact, he said, his health appeared to be important.

Born February 21, 1925, Gehrels was a unique and wonderful person. Raised in the Dutch Bib truth, reality, and the existence of God at a very early age. He was only a teenager when he be War II. Gehrels fled to England, where he carried out secret operations for the Dutch governs concentration camp.

After the war, Gehrels studied astronomy at Leiden University. In the late 1940s, on a shoest California, where he met famous astronomer Walter Baade at Palomar Observatory. Soon he





Tom Gehrels pauses during a 1974 press conference concerning results from Pioneer 11. The close-up views of Jupiter during their flybys.

NASA (left); NASA / Ricardo Nunes (right)

Gehrels worked with fellow Dutchman Gerard Kuiper, first at the Yerkes Observatory, and lat his life. A pioneer in balloon-borne observations and skilled in polarimetry and photometry, l (actually scanning photopolarimeters) on the twin <u>Pioneer spacecraft</u> that obtained the first a

As a young Dutch amateur astronomer in the 1970s, I felt nothing less than awe for this man, <u>Palomar-Leiden asteroid survey</u> with Kees van Houten and Ingrid van Houten-Groeneveld. I asteroids. (It's one of the reasons why so many Dutch people are immortalized in the solar sy



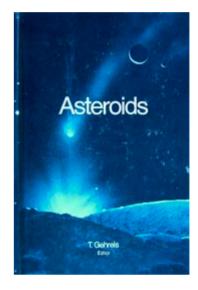
Domes for the Spacewatch Project's 1.8-m and 0.9-m telescopes on Kitt Peak, Arizona.

In 1983, together with his Arizona colleague Bob McMillan, Gehrels founded the Spacewatch

Peak National Observatory for threatening near-Earth objects. I remember interviewing Geh asteroid would be discovered that would hit the Earth," I offered. "What would you do?" His and have a look, of course!"

On the shelf behind his Tucson desk is perhaps Gehrels' most enduring legacy: the 30-or-so 1

Produced by the University of Arizona Press, these tomes cover almost every topic in our sola kind of collective bible to planetary astronomers. For his tireless involvement as the series' go Planetary Sciences honored him with the <u>Harold Masursky Award</u> for outstanding service to



Published in 1979, *Asteroids*, edited by Tom Gehrels, was the first volume in the University o *S&T: Dennis diCicco*

My brief visit in April came just two weeks after a luncheon at which Gehrels was honored for University of Arizona. But we spoke little of that, or killer asteroids, or the Space Science Seri

Instead, we mainly discussed his latest unconventional ideas about cosmology. Inspired by h Chandrasekhar, Gehrels explored an almost mystical equation that appears to numerically cofinal monograph, <u>Can We Do Without the Big Bang?</u>, he describes his own view of Truth and ideas concerning an "interuniversal medium", dark energy as a consequence of "old photons Bang.

"I've been called a crackpot by cosmologists, and I can't blame them," he said, again with the "They've built their careers on a wrong idea, and I am an outsider. But I don't care. When I st happened: no one would take me seriously."

As I left the small office — which probably would have smelled of incense if Gehrels had beer Suddenly he frowned and looked wounded, recalling the compulsory church visits in the sma But then his face brightened again as he said: "Have you been there recently? They've torn it

In his search for understanding, Tom Gehrels encountered the frailty of humanity — constan when he tried to answer the biggest questions science can ask. He was a remarkable fellow, a I feel privileged to have met him less than three months before he died.

Asteroid 10986 Govert, named after contributor Govert Schilling, was discovered as part of

COMMENTS

David Oesper

July 14, 2011 at 2:15 am

How unfortunate that Tom passed away just five days prior to the Dawn spacecraft entering a most prominent features on Vesta that will soon be discovered by Dawn could be named after contributions to asteroid science.

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Ted Hunt

July 15, 2011 at 3:09 pm

The link to 'Can We Do Without the Big Bang?' returns a response from the U of A bookstore A is trying to distance itself from Mr. Gehrels' unconventional views just days after his passin

If the article IS being supressed, I'd say that's a fine reason to read it. If anyone can forward a how to find it, I'm sure many S&T readers (besides me) would be appreciative.

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David Oesper

July 16, 2011 at 12:59 pm

The S&T URL to Tom's monograph was incomplete. The U of A bookstore URL is lengthy, so

http://tinyurl.com/6k303f2

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coolstar

July 17, 2011 at 10:58 am

It is indeed sad news to read of Dr. Gehrels passing. I heartily second the idea that same proressentially invented the modern techniques used in hunting for NEOs, among his other cont into a field, cosmology, that was entirely new to him.

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Graham W. Wolf

July 18, 2011 at 6:50 pm

Tom Gehrels is the latest in a long sad list of astro-luminaries that the world has lost in recense Sandage (amongst others).

When I started working at the Carter National Observatory of NZ in the late 1980's and fullti huge contributions to asteroidal and astrometric science... the latter being especially apprecion work.

Tom comes from a long line of Dutch born astro-luminaries that go back several proud centu

recent decades:- Jan Oort, Van Der Hulst, and Gerrard Kuiper. Huygens famous quotation "I fondly recall Tom Gehrels.

Tom has left huge shoes to fill, and certainly raised the scientific bar for us lesser mortals. Th the Science. One of the true greats... sadly missed.

Graham W. Wolf Barber Grove Observatory (BGO) New Zealand

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but more importantly they cannot be disproven and the little bit that I did know have the opportunity to speak with him since. He will be missed...



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