

# Crowning glory for Custer

*New dome tops the observatory's tower*

By Ambrose Clancy

A delivery all the way from Illinois will help people to see all the way into the solar system.

On Friday, Custer Institute's observatory in Southold was crowned with a brand-new 22-foot galvanized steel dome. The dome was trucked to Southold on April 3 by its maker, the Ash Manufacturing Company of Plainfield, Ill.. The delivery to Main Bayview Road was "in a million pieces," said Myron Young Friday afternoon. Mr. Young is a Custer Institute member who helped with the process of assembling the dome and setting it on top of the venerable brick observatory. Even though Friday was a day of stiff winds, the installation went without a hitch, he noted.

Treasurer Barbara Lebkuecher said the new dome cost about \$70,000. The institute — which has Long Island's oldest public observatory — is a not-for-profit organization and funds for the dome were raised by donations, she added.

Ms. Lebkuecher said members were thrilled with the new addition and looked forward to keeping the institute "an educational tool for the community."

**'...everything down to the last nut and bolt fit.'**

—Myron Young

When renovations are complete, a 16-inch Meade telescope will be installed to bring the heavens closer for

viewing on Saturday evenings, free of charge.

The new dome replaced the wooden original, constructed by boat builders, which had topped the observatory since the 1940s. "It wasn't repairable anymore and anyway, you couldn't find parts for it," Mr. Young said, leading the way through the institute's meeting hall and library to the stairs leading up to the observatory. "The wooden dome had rotted out so much that it didn't even turn anymore," he added.

On the top level, member Rico Verticchio, who also helped assemble and install the dome, stood on the raw plywood floor. In the future, the floor might be carpeted, Mr. Young said. The galvanized steel seemed as light as aluminum. Mr. Verticchio operated controls that moved the dome around and opened and closed a section, revealing houses and open fields below.

Mr. Young marveled at the engineering of the dome and the process of delivering it to Southold. "There were so many pieces, but everything down to the last nut and bolt fit," he said. Mr. Young said he thought the observatory should be spruced up and running in about a month's time.



Suffolk Times photos by Evan Tiska



**Above: Brian Super of Ash Manufacturing Company holding the galvanized steel dome steady against the wind Friday as it moved into place atop Custer Institute's observatory in Southold. Left: Mr. Super (right) and Kurt Massey inspecting the inside of the new dome after the 22-foot structure was settled on top of the observatory.**

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