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# Amateur astronomers get to use telescope

By ROB STEIN UPI Science Editor | April 9, 1990 [Follow @upi](#)



BALTIMORE -- A schoolteacher, a mother, an engineer, a computer scientist and a museum worker will join 162 professional astronomers in using the Hubble Space Telescope during its first year in operation.

Picked from several hundred applicants from across the United States, the amateur astronomers will get a coveted chance to study the universe with the \$1.5 billion telescope, the most advanced instrument of its kind.



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The telescope will be carried into orbit by the space shuttle Discovery, which is scheduled to blastoff Tuesday.

'This is a peak. There's nothing greater than working with the world's greatest telescope,' said Peter Kandefer, 43, an electrical engineer from New Hartford, Conn. 'This is an exciting opportunity.'

Kandefer will try to learn more about a star in the handle of the Big Dipper called Epsilon Ursae Majoris by studying the colors of light it emits. He hopes to reveal more about the structure and evolution of stars.

Riccardo Giacconi of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, which is coordinating science projects with the telescope, offered the opportunity to amateur astronomers to acknowledge their role in astronomy and stimulate their ideas.

'It's beyond my wildest dreams,' said James Secosky, 42, of Shortsville, N.Y., who teaches science at Bloomfield Central school near Rochester.

'This is really something for me,' he said noting he started his interest in astronomy as a youngster with a \$20 telescope.

Secosky will look for evidence of frost forming on Jupiter's moon Io as it passes out of the cold shadow of its parent planet to learn more about the moon's atmosphere.

Ana Larson, a 42-year-old Seattle mother of two who recently returned to school at the University of Washington, plans to hunt for planets in the process of being formed.

Theodore Hewitt, who works at the Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley, Calif., will wait for an explosive stellar outburst called a nova in the hopes of using the phenomena to learn more about comets.

'This is one of the great unknowns about our solar systems. What is the origin of comets? How many are there? Where do they come from?' Hewitt said.

Ray Sterner, 37, a computer scientist and mathematician at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, will study mysterious luminous arcs discovered in 1986 in galaxy clusters 3 billion to 6 billion light years from Earth.

Many astronomers believe the arcs are optical effects but Sterner, who lives in Woodvine, Md., thinks one may be produced by colliding galaxies.

'It's pretty amazing to have time on the space telescope,' Sterner said. 'So many people want time on it and many professional astronomers can't even get time.'

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