

Center for New Thinking

A public forum for the discussion of new ideas and literature

By Rebecca Haynes
staff writer

THE HISTORY OF THE universe isn't something most people could comprehend in a two-hour session, but a group of local residents did their best to do just that.

They were reviewing the book "A Brief History of Time" by Stephen Hawking. The program was sponsored by The Center for New Thinking, a Birmingham organization into its 12th year as a public forum for new and innovative ideas.

"I don't think I understand all the specifics, but it gave me a good understanding of the progression of thought (on the formation of the universe)," said Joanne Hulce, a frequent attendee of the Center's lectures and a Plymouth resident. "I enjoy coming to his (Sherwin Wine) lectures because he gives you so much background it makes it easy to understand. I think he should be doing something at a university so students could hear him and learn from him. He has so much enthusiasm."

Sherwin Wine, whose full-time job is as rabbi at the Birmingham Temple, started the Center back in December of 1976 because he thought there was a need in the area for a group to discuss new ideas and new literature.

"I'VE ALWAYS done a lot of lecturing," Wine said. "I majored in philosophy at the University of Michigan and I lectured for a while at the U-M extension down at Rackham."

"It seemed to me we could do a better job of reaching out to people in their own settings, and I believe there is a need on the part of the public to be introduced to new ideas and new literature," he said. "So with the help of a lot of friends, we organized the Center. Our home base is Birmingham but our lectures are primarily here (Somerset Mall auditorium). We also hold them in Grosse Pointe, Plymouth, Bloomfield Hills,

West Bloomfield and downriver."

Each month the Center hosts a Sunday Forum and a Thursday Forum at Somerset. Programs are offered other days of the week at other locations. Topics have ranged from the ethics of corporate mergers to rediscovering love to glansnost to the wars of the world.

The Center has sponsored more than 440 lectures on contemporary and classic literature and more than 275 on current events and lifestyle problems. Margaret Mead, Robert Polak, Philip Slater and Susan Sontag are among some of the many guest lecturers.

This month's Sunday Forum topics revolve around "Making Myself Strong," including "Being Decisive," "Developing Discipline," and "Self-Reliance." The Thursday Forum focuses on "The Frontiers of Science." It includes reviews of new science books by Stephen Hawking, Robert Augros, Michael Gazzaniga and Michael P. Ghilghieri.

"I DO a lot of background reading and try to draw from a lot of sources when I give my lectures," Wine said. "Generally I do most of my reading between 11 at night and 2:30 in the morning, when I won't be disturbed. I don't require a lot of sleep and I can't read during the day, I just don't have the time."

The Center has seen tremendous growth in the number of people who attend, nearly tripling since its onset, he said.

"People who've come through the years have developed a very strong attachment to the group," Wine said. "We usually get a very diverse crowd and what we offer is a way of learning that doesn't involve a classroom and extensive time commitments."

Another project developed by the Center is the monograph, a series of written essays on subjects of either philosophical or general or historic interest. One has been written for the past three years and their topics include the fear of death, the future

of the automobile industry and the pursuit of happiness.

"We wanted to have a series of written essays on important issues," Wine said. "I think they have lasting value and are of interest to a lot of people."

Jim Fletcher is a Birmingham resident and a Center board member. He's been involved with the Center "almost since it's beginning" and now sits on its board.

"I'm an old generalist myself and in a world of intense specialization I think it's marvelous that Sherwin can talk on 60 different subjects every year as if he's an expert on all of them. He's an educator, but he's very

unique.

"I'M 60 years old and I've never seen an equivalent of this man," Fletcher said. "We need people who can move easily and without fear in areas where angels fear to tread."

Fletcher said he became involved with the center through his wife, who at the time was trying to be a part of growing community activities.

"She came home with the newsletter and all it took was one lecture and I've been hooked ever since," he said. "For a time I helped lecture. I was a professor and I liked to talk and Sherwin asked me if I had a lecture up my sleeve and of

course, I did."

As a member of the board, Fletcher said its purpose is to discuss any Center problems and act as a sounding board for Wine's ideas for future lectures. Questions about upcoming lectures, times and places should be directed to the Center, 352-0264.

"I think the lectures I enjoy the most are when he talks about the world's trouble spots," Fletcher said. "It's really his specialty. He travels to all of these places every summer so he can give a first-hand perspective."

"He's a one-man college and a one-man faculty," Fletcher said with a laugh. "My standing joke is that

it's nice to live in a college town."

So what is the history of the universe?

Wine explained that Hawking believes in the "Big Bang" theory, saying there wasn't really a "bang."

"The universe is expanding," he said. "It gets bigger as you keep blowing, but there's no beginning or ending, it just continues to expand," he said. "Hawking also says there probably won't be a Big Crunch, and if it is it won't happen for a long time so there's really nothing to worry about. But as your insurance man always says, you should be prepared for anything."

Party planners

Michelle Dorrington of Plymouth (front row, from left), Sue Johnston of Canton, Barbara Sullivan of Farmington Hills, Vicky Sorenson of Westland (back row, from left), Marcia Kownski and Diana Tarnacki, both of Livonia, are the "brains" behind the annual Catholic Central High School Valentine card party. The party will be held at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 15, in the high school cafeteria, 14200 Brookfield Drive, Redford. Admission is \$4 and covers cards, dice, games and dessert. For reservations, call Janet Lovell at 4767-5817 or Carol McGrath at 681-6270.



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