

originated in that structured community-wide consultation. Heated debate as well as numerous studies, crossing all sorts of boundaries, of both nations and of disciplines, stimulated the emergence of countless ideas, new problems and original solutions. In spite of great diversity, in starting positions, national astronomy cultures and engineering traditions, a consensus formed that culminated in the momentous decision by the ESO Council on December 8, 1987.

The ESO community owes much to the leadership and foresight of two key people: Lo Woltjer, ESO's Director Gen-

eral, who orchestrated both the scientific discussion and the political process towards this ambitious goal; and to Daniel Enard, the gifted engineering scientist who led the evolution of the conceptual design and will now play a central role in its engineering realization.

It is a privilege as well as a challenge to succeed Lo Woltjer at just this juncture. European astronomy is deeply indebted to him for the depth and persistence of his efforts. We wish him well and look forward to his further contributions to ESO and to astronomy.



The ESO Council in session on December 8, 1987.

About "The Messenger – El Mensajero"

You have the 50th issue of the ESO *Messenger* in your hands.

It all began in the early 1970's with a growing ESO staff in Chile and in Europe. The Director General of ESO, Professor A. Blaauw, felt there was a need for increased communication between the ESO communities in Hamburg, Geneva, Santiago, La Serena and La Silla, not to forget the individuals in other places who were in some way connected to ESO. In May 1974, the first issue of the new ESO journal was launched with a total of 6 pages. After somewhat irregular publication dates during the first two years, a quarterly schedule has been adhered to since issue No. 4 in March 1976. As the readers will have noticed, the scope of the ESO *Messenger* has become broader and it has grown, culminating with a 60-page issue in March 1987 that included the first news about SN 1987A.

Although the first 50 issues together have brought 1,500 pages, other semipopular journals have published many more during the same time. And although some colour pictures have been brought in the more recent issues, there are other journals which by far surpass the *Messenger* with glossy views of the sky. Scientific articles abound in the professional journals, so why the *Messenger*?

Because it brings the latest news from ESO, the main organization for astronomy in Europe. As the astronomical research at La

Silla and in Garching reflects an increasingly broader section of front-line astronomy, so the *Messenger* has become a multi-faceted mirror of modern astronomy and astrophysics. The articles are mostly written while the research is still underway and frequently convey the thrill of discovery. Although the guidelines to authors indicate that contributions in general should be written for a wide audience, we do not attempt to edit everything into a uniform format. The articles and news reflect the style of their authors and by difference in level and form, they enliven and bring variety to the *Messenger* issues. We do not expect that every reader will read everything, but there should be something for everybody.

With a circulation of more than 4,000, the *Messenger* reaches a wide audience, in the ESO member countries and elsewhere, including professional and amateur astronomers, as well as other groups like teachers and decision makers. For some years now it has been indexed in the semi-annual volumes of "Astronomy and Astrophysics Abstracts", and a growing number of references in the professional literature to *Messenger* articles indicate increased awareness in many places.

On the occasion of the "golden" jubilee, we wish to thank all authors for many excellent contributions. In return, we shall continue to publish the ESO *Messenger* rapidly and efficiently so that their achievements will become better known to more people. *The Editors*