

most important step forward. Firstly, the number statistics could be improved by a significant factor thus allowing to decide whether the description of the IMF by a single power law is really adequate over a large mass interval or not. Secondly, the danger of contamination by merged stellar images is expected to decrease considerably. Thirdly, also older clusters with narrower mass intervals could be investigated in order to uncover the influence of cluster dynamics on the IMF.

The potential of the Magellanic Clouds as "astrophysical laboratories" is still very much alive!

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## A "Happy Hour" at ESO Headquarters



On April 30, 1991, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Mrs. Christa Euler's services with ESO, the Section Visiting Astronomers had the pleasure to invite all ESO staff, on behalf of the Director General, to a "Happy Hour". The event was celebrated in a friendly and informal atmosphere. A beautiful book on the paintings in the Musée d'Orsay was presented to her by Prof. H. van der Laan, and J. Breysacher gave her a nice bouquet of spring flowers.

Mrs. Christa Euler joined ESO Chile on April 1st, 1966, at the time when Prof. O. Heckmann was the Director General of the Organization. At first she was installed in the office at the Santiago guesthouse and later in the Vitacura building, where she was responsible for all secretarial work in Santiago. Three years later, on the arrival of Prof. B.E.

Westerlund, she took over the post of secretary to the ESO Director in Chile. With the exception of a ten-month period spent in the Personnel Department in Hamburg, she held this position until mid-1976. Her definitive move to Europe took place in September 1976. At the newly installed Headquarters in Garching, she took up duty in the Section Visiting Astronomers then headed by Dr. A.B. Muller. During the 15 years that Mrs. Christa Euler has now been working in this Section, she has – among many other things – remarkably handled about ten thousand proposals for observing time and perfectly organized several hundreds of travel arrangements to La Silla. Today her name is familiar to most European astronomers as well as to many others overseas. *J. BREYSACHER, ESO*

## Whatever Happened to Comet Halley?

As reported in the last issue of the *Messenger* (No. 63, p. 22), Comet Halley was found to have undergone a major outburst, seen as a 19-mag cloud surrounding the nucleus in mid-February 1991 on CCD frames, obtained with the Danish 1.5-m telescope at La Silla. At that time, the comet was more than 14 A.U. from the Sun; this was the first time such an event had ever been observed, so far from the Sun. Observations at Hawaii (K. Meech) and Pic du Midi (C. Buil and collaborators) have confirmed the outburst. The French ob-

servers used a 61-cm telescope with a CCD, illustrating that Halley had become so bright that it was almost within reach of well-equipped amateur astronomers!

Very deep CCD observations were made at La Silla during March and April 1991, and it is now possible to say more about the nature of this outburst, although the cause has still not been unambiguously identified.

In late February, it was possible to obtain a low-dispersion, low-S/N spectrum of the coma with the 3.5-m NTT. It

showed a solar reflection spectrum, which together with the measured colour strongly indicates that the coma mainly consists of dust particles. Still it cannot be excluded that there is a little gas present.

Comparing the many ESO images which were obtained during a 60-day interval, starting on February 12, it is clear that the surface brightness of the cloud progressively becomes fainter while its size increases. At the same time the brightness of the central condensation decreases and it becomes