

# Meteorologist's "Sense of Wonder" at Science North

by Lewis Poulin

In June 1984, having gotten leave without pay from AES, I put all my things in my truck and, with a mixture of enthusiasm about my plans and regrets over having to leave Gander, headed off for Sudbury, Ontario. The reason for my trip: to spend six months helping develop the Atmospheric Sciences department at Sudbury's brand-new science centre, Science North.

Science North, which is housed in a building shaped like a giant snowflake, was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen in October 1984. This event marked the fruition of long efforts to develop and realize the concepts on which the centre is based. Science Centres are becoming more and more common in North American cities, but Science North did not want to be "just another science centre". Years of research were devoted to creating the right atmosphere for visitors. Throughout the building, guides are there to offer them a warm welcome and answer their myriad questions about the wide variety of scientific experiments on display. The whole centre is divided into mini-laboratories where visitors are encouraged to handle the equipment. The subjects dealt with range from biology to geology, from human physiology to computer science, from physics to meteorology and more — in short, there is

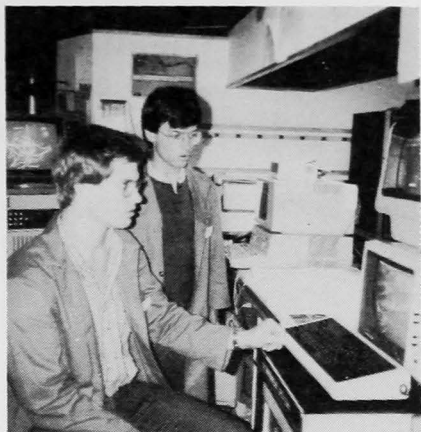
something for everyone.

AES contributed most of the funding for the Atmospheric Sciences department, and thanks to AES, Science North now has one of the most complete automated climatological observation stations in Canada.

Visitors to the department get the chance to conduct meteorological experiments, such as manufacturing snow in a deep freeze, with the help of dry ice. Then they may want to try blowing a soap bubble into the freezer, and watch it slowly freeze as it sinks gently in the cold air.

Some days, visitors may chat with special guests. One weekend, our guest was Arjen Verkaik, a photographer who is blind in one eye and has only 10% vision in the other. In the course of his career, he has taken over 7 000 photographs of the sky. His visit thus provides a fine opportunity to interest other photographers in certain aspects of meteorology.

One of the unique features of Science North is that volunteers of all ages are present in the laboratories. All of them have shown a special interest in science and they are encouraged to develop it. All the equipment is at their disposal. In the Atmospheric Sciences department, volunteers with special training monitor



*Lewis Poulin (right) with exhibit director Alan Nursall at Viewfax Display Unit.*

and maintain the meteorological equipment, and also get the chance to discuss current atmospheric conditions with the resident meteorologist.

Working at Science North, I had the chance to discuss AES's daily forecasts with a surprising variety of people — pilots, fishermen, householders who wanted to know when to water their gardens. These conversations increased my appreciation of the role AES products play in people's daily lives.

One project now under development at Science North is a television program that will specialize in presenting and interpreting weather bulletins. Once the technical problems have been solved, the centre's broad scientific expertise and sophisticated equipment will enable this program to show viewers more about the links between meteorology and other scientific disciplines.

A few years from now, we well may find that the money and effort AES has invested in Science North have helped to establish the best meteorological interpretation office in all North America.

For me, Science North was not only a lesson in organization, but also a place where you were allowed, and even encouraged, to ask questions, and could then try to answer them — a place where you could experience a child's sense of wonder while learning a bit more about the workings of the various components of the environment in which we live.

For further information on Science North you can contact, Alan Nursall head of the Atmosphere Exhibit, at 705-522-3700.

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