

Atlanta's Foundation Of Truth A Place For Real Meeting Of Minds



From Left, Psychics Batchelder, Esclaven, Asensio, Twombly, Tarbell

By Robert Lamb
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Don't walk into The Foundation of Truth and greet the people there with a "What do you know?" Believe it: You don't have time to hear all they know. Housed in an old building at 270 15th St., the foundation is the spiritual home of more psychics than you can shake a schtick at.

Not all of the foundation's 400 to 500 members are psychics. Many are simply interested in psychic phenomena. But if you were looking for a specific Atlanta psychic and stood at the front door of the

foundation long enough, five'll get you 10 he or she would soon appear.

On a recent evening, for instance, several of Atlanta's psychic *creme de la creme* were on hand (on palm?) at the same time: Naunie Batchelder, Pat Esclaven, Don Hudson, Roger Tarbell, John Twombly and Lucille Asensio. Get those six together in the same room and you could pick up police calls from Perth, Australia.

"The foundation is a non-profit corporation established for religious, educational and charitable purposes," said

Durward Till, chairman of its nine-member board of trustees. "Anyone can join for \$15 a year. With the membership goes library privileges and discounts on various classes and lectures."

Till, though not a psychic, is typical of the kind of person drawn to The Foundation of Truth. Around 1970, after a life-long interest in "how the mind works and how you could use it a little better," he became seriously interested in astrology and other metaphysical subjects. In 1975, on the advice of a friend, he visited the foundation, "liked

what I found and joined."

Last November, after tolling in maintenance for Delta Air Lines for 34 years, he retired and launched a new career as a practicing astrologer. Today, though 59, he's a new man. "I feel younger than I did when I was 39," he said.

He said he "broke loose from the old pattern I'd been living in" when something called "Uranus transit over the sun ascendent" showed up in his astrological chart. "Uranus basically represents sudden change," he said.

But the transformation

actually started to take shape much earlier, beginning with the resurgence about a decade ago of public interest in metaphysics and the occult, he said.

"I was a very conservative, middle-of-the-road type of person until all that hit and I began to expand my mind a little. I was a deacon in the Baptist church. I have no difficulty with (the church) and am still a nominal member. But it doesn't say enough for me. I find myself moving in a new direction, and wherever it goes, I go. I go with the flow."

Last Dec. 1, he took over as chairman of the board and full-time director of the foundation.

In addition to speakers, the foundation offers Sunday fellowship services, a healing clinic, and classes in such subjects as astral projection and past-life regression. (For more information, call 875-7846.)

To those wishing to get established as psychics, the foundation also affords not only a home base but a procedure for recognition in the psychic community. To gain such recognition, Till said, a candidate must give readings to at least five of the foundation's board members, who then pass on not only how good the candidate is but how he or she conveys the information to the subject.

"They might be very good at picking up things, but the board wants to make sure that what they do pick up is not passed along in a negative or damaging way," Till said.

Lucille Asensio, for example, who moved to Atlanta from Philadelphia last year, recently completed the process and is now affiliated with the foundation.

Another phase of the approval procedure comes during what is probably the foundation's most popular activity: a psychic fair held at the foundation on the first Saturday of each month and offering psychic mini-readings to the public at \$4 a go.

Psychics wishing foundation approval give readings at the fair, after which their subjects are asked to fill out evaluation sheets for study by the board.

"Admittedly, (psychic phenomena) is not an easy area in which to evaluate someone, but it's the best procedure we've come up with," Till said. "We don't want somebody who is totally off the wall."

Till believes the increased public interest in psychic phenomena has "its good points and its bad." "It can show people that there's more to the world than we can pick up with our five senses. It can provide additional input to help people make decisions. But since people often want somebody to tell 'em what to do, it can wind up being used as a crutch."

Nevertheless, he believes it's part of a major new trend in human affairs.

"We're getting into some different times, new ages," he said. "We've been in a very materialistic, mechanistic culture since the 1800s. Now, as cycles go, we seem to be reacting against that. Now, people are saying, 'Hey, everything is more than a mere machine.'"

Knitting his fingers together to illustrate, he added: "I feel we're moving toward a time when science, religion and metaphysics will come closer together," and he feels that the foundation is in the vanguard of that movement.

Founded in October 1973, the organization was born in a most unorthodox way. A small group of people interested in psychic phenomena had been meeting informally in private homes to study and meditate, when one night a medium in their midst went into a trance.

"I was there," said Jo O'Shields, a founding member and current officer of the organization who describes herself as also a counselor "and part-time janitor."

She added: "I'm not at liberty to say who the woman was, but while she was in a trance, a person came through her, calling himself a messenger of God. He outlined the plan for a foundation, saying it would start with a small group and would grow and become organized, getting its start by word-of-mouth. The first office of the foundation was in my living room."

Ms. O'Shields would not hazard a guess as to how many psychics Atlanta has, but she feels the city has attracted more than its share — "because of the energy, I suppose. We feel that Atlanta is a light center."

Asked to explain what she meant, she said, "We feel that before the year 2000 there will be many earth changes" — natural disasters and catastrophes — "and that Atlanta will be a place that will survive."