

Author makes astronomy accessible to the visually and hearing impaired

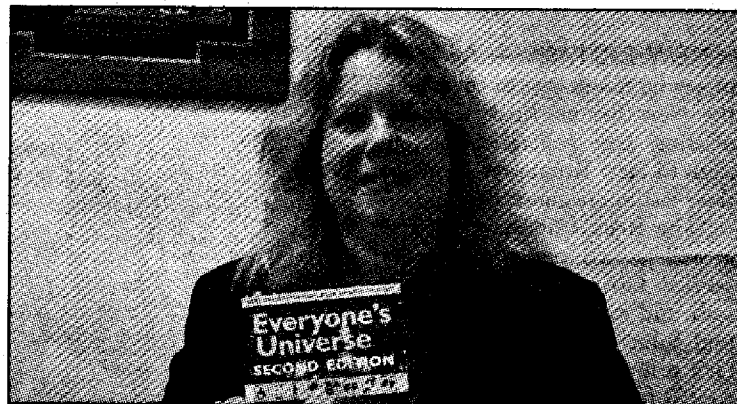
By **ROBERT STORACE**
STAFF WRITER

NEW BRITAIN — A long-time astronomy buff, city resident Noreen Grice remembers the reaction she got from blind students who attended a planetarium show when she worked for the Boston Museum of Science decades ago — they hated it.

“They said the show was awful,” said Grice, 49. “It caught me off guard. I didn’t realize astronomy was not accessible until that group pointed it out to me.”

From that moment in Boston, Grice has been on a mission to make astronomy accessible to everyone including the hearing and visually impaired, those with mobile impairments and neurological disorders. She went on to write five tactile books — all touchable — about astronomy for the visually impaired. Her book “Touch the Universe” was the first book in braille ever on Amazon.com.

Last month, Grice, who was raised in Walden, Mass., published her sixth book: “Everyone’s Universe: Second Edition” as a guide for educators to better teach those with impairments and disabilities about astronomy. The book is \$27.95 and is available at Barnes & Noble in Farmington and at Amazon.com



Robert Storace | Staff

Noreen Grice of New Britain with her latest book.

and BarnesandNoble.com.

“My passion is making astronomy accessible to people with disabilities,” Grice said Thursday.

The first half of her 336-page book deals with how educators can better communicate with their students. For example, there is a section on working with the visually impaired. Grice notes there are several things educators can do to help that part of the population learn about the world of astronomy, which is the study of places beyond the earth, such as stars, planets and moons.

“I write about how to pictorially describe images available through the telescope and ways to provide a tactile tour of the telescope,” she

said. “I also explain how to enlarge images from the telescope to the monitor, which will make it more accessible for someone with low vision.”

She also worked with the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford in offering educators ideas on how to better teach the hearing impaired about astronomy.

The second half of the book is a guide to accessible astronomy destinations. There are none in central Connecticut and the closest one is at the Western Connecticut State University Observatory Planetarium in Danbury, she said.

“They have tactile images available to accompany planetarium shows,” she noted.

Grice said more people — especially with the interest in Mars recently — are getting involved in astronomy and all it has to offer.

“Astronomy is an adventure,” she said. “When I think of the universe, it’s a really big story and we are one small chapter.”

Those who know of Grice’s work say she has a strong dedication to help those with impairments to learn about astronomy.

“The work she has done is phenomenal,” said Kristine Larsen, astronomy professor at Central Connecticut State University. “I’ve used her work in my teaching, everything from using materials for the blind to giving us strategies to teach the visually and hearing impaired.”

Grice’s website can be accessed at youcandoastronomy.com.

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