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Wheaton native Grote Reber, left, yesterday tours AT&T Bell Laboratories. The DuPage Heritage Gallery will honor Reber with a re- ception and dinner at 5:30 p.m., Saturday. Tickets are $35. Call Nola at Gary-Wheaton Bank, 665-2600, for reservations.

Tuning in to Reber
'You don't solve scientific problems by referendum'

By Susan Maycinik
Journal Staff

WHEATON — Grote Reber, a Wheaton native who built the world's first radio telescope, has never been one to let popular opinion put a damper on his plans.

When radio engineer Karl Jansky discovered radio signals coming from outer space in 1933, Reber was ready to quit his job and go to work studying the phenomenon.

But, as he told the audience at a lecture at AT&T Bell Laboratories yesterday, no one in the astronomical community was interested.

"Astronomers didn't know beans from bananas about radio equipment and couldn't care less," Reber said.

UNDAUNTED, REBER spent $2,000 from his own pocket to build a radio telescope in the back yard of his home on West Seminary Ave. in 1937.

"I decided if no one else wanted to do anything, it would be just as well if I did," Reber said.

With the telescope, he confirmed Jansky's findings and began mapping sources of radio signals.

The radio telescope was the only one in existence until after World War II. Reber's invention made possible the discovery of black holes, quasars, and other astronomical phenomena.

REBER REMEMBERS the telescope created quite a stir in the community. Sporting a dish 31 feet in diameter, the telescope resembled today's satellite dishes. He said several rumors circulated about the contraption.

"Some people thought I in-

Grote Reber

vented the machine to control the weather — to make it rain," he chuckled.

He said the wildest rumor sprung up when a small plane experienced engine trouble after flying over the dish. Soon afterwards Wheaton townspeople were saying that Reber invented the machine to disable enemy aircraft during the impending war.

Reber continued gathering data in Wheaton for 10 years before moving the telescope to Sterling, Va.

HE BUILT a new radio telescope in Hawaii in 1951 to map low-frequency, long-wave signals. In 1954 he moved to Tasmania, an island off the coast of Australia, in order to map long-wave radio signals in the southern hemisphere.

Reber travels annually to the United States to work on various projects here. Not all involve radio astronomy — he has worked on a design for an electric car with a company in Palatine.

Although "it doesn't work," features from the design may be used to create fuel-efficient conventional automobiles, Reber said.

As a result of his accomplishments, Reber will be inducted Saturday into the DuPage Heritage Gallery. But Reber would rather talk about current issues than his early discoveries.

"TO ME, (the early work) is all sort of passe," he said.

Reber is bucking the tide of scientific opinion again in his belief that the universe is *not* expanding.

"Big Bang cosmology is nothing but another religion," Reber told Bell Labs employees.

"Most people assume objects are moving away based on erroneous interpretation of the evidence," Reber said.

INSTEAD, HE supports the "tired light theory." Based on his observations, he believes the phenomena that indicate movement to others are caused instead by the weakening of light photons as they travel through space.

The fact that the Big Bang theory is almost universally accepted by scientists does not trouble Reber.

"You don't solve scientific problems by referendum," he said. "Nobody else believed in Copernicus either, but he was right."

Reber urged the Bell employees not to give blanket acceptance to assumptions of the scientific community.

REBER REFUSES to accept conventional wisdom even on more terrestrial matters. Acquaintances in Tasmania told him his plans to build a solar heated home wouldn't work.

"I built it anyway," he said.

After a few trials and some errors, Reber's "engineering experiment" is working just fine.