

# Irvin Koch, Spread Love of Science Fiction

By KAY POWELL The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
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When science fiction fandom in the Southeast had no critical mass, Irvin M. Koch created it.

In the 1970s, there were a couple of hundred fans in the South, said Toni Weisskopf of Athens. Today, 30,000 attend Dragoncon in Atlanta.

Theirs is a world where devotees are fandom, conventions are cons, music is filk, their magazines are fanzines and the literature they prefer is science fiction, never sci-fi.

"Irv was instrumental in growing science fiction fandom," Ms. Weisskopf said. "Without Irv, there's no doubt there would be no fandom. He's always been a part of my world of fandom. He was the first to give me a fanzine.

"He was legendary for having a briefcase he carried around with him," she said. "If you showed the slightest interest, he had tons of stuff to give you."

The graveside service for Mr. Koch, 58, who died Friday of an apparent heart attack at his Lithonia residence, is at 3:30 p.m. today in Jackson City Cemetery. Dressler's Jewish Funeral Care and Hais-ten Funeral Home in Jackson are in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Koch, an industrial engineer by training, shifted to a life of literature as a bookstore owner and a librarian, all the while investing his knowledge and energy into organizing conventions and bringing newcomers to fandom.

When Michael Liebmann moved to Atlanta from Los Angeles, he left a substantial fandom behind. Mr. Koch introduced him to the local Middle Earth Rocketry Society, which he has belonged to ever since.

"He was quirky," Mr. Liebmann said. "This is a man who for over 40 years worked on conventions, a man who people looked to for his wisdom. His



Irvin Koch (fourth from left right, with hands on the shoulders of wife Kay Pinckney) poses with members of the Confederates of Wisteria Lodge, a Sherlock Holmes club of which he was 'telegrapher.'

knowledge was encyclopedic when it came to things scientific."

The fantasy side of science fiction is what he enjoyed reading, said his wife, Kay Pinckney. He was a fan of the Harry Potter books and those by Robert Heinlein and C.J. Cherryh. He created two popular conventions, Chattacon and Deepsouthcon, among others.

"He served as an ambassador to new people," Ms. Weisskopf said. "He had so much energy."

Mr. Koch expanded his interests to mystery literature and served on the boards of directors of the local Sherlock Holmes club Confederates of Wisteria Lodge and of Sisters in Crime. He brought his considerable convention skills to organizing the first Gathering of Southern Sherlockians to make it a landmark event, said gasogene, or president, Kent Ross of Rex.

Mr. Koch was instrumental in developing an e-mail roster of members, and in honor of his excellent work he received the title of telegrapher, because telegrams figure prominently in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Mr. Ross said.

"He was a good Sherlockian. He was always interesting. He saw things from a different angle and asked probing questions. He always had an interesting point of view. He blended science fiction and Sherlock Holmes in strange ways."

There are no other immediate survivors.