

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

“Seeking Signs of Life”

A Symposium Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of NASA’s Exobiology Program

Thursday October 14, 2010

9 am-4 pm

Global Vision Center

Lockheed Martin Space Systems Co.

2121 Crystal Drive

Arlington, VA 22202

Sponsored by the NASA Astrobiology Program

Hosted by Lockheed Martin

This event is free and open to the public

RSVP to exosymposium@gmail.com

For updates and information about Webcasting, see:

<http://astrobiology.nasa.gov>

For more information, contact: libillin@gwu.edu

In 1959, NASA funded its first exobiology investigation, a life-detection experiment for Viking mission to Mars. In 1960, the agency established an exobiology program, whose early managers adopted an approach to advancing this field of study by funding forward-thinking, boundary-bending, multidisciplinary research projects that other funding sources tended to judge as too risky. NASA’s Viking mission included three exobiology experiments designed to look for evidence of life on Mars. By the 1980s, NASA expanded its exobiology program to encompass studies of evolutionary biology. In the 1990s, NASA again expanded the breadth and depth of this program, broadening the boundaries of “exobiology” to establish “astrobiology” as a program encompassing studies of chemical evolution in interstellar space, the formation and evolution of planets, and the natural history of Earth in addition to exobiology and evolutionary biology. Today NASA’s Astrobiology Program addresses three fundamental questions: How does life begin and evolve? Is there life beyond Earth and, if so, how can we detect it? What is the future of life on Earth and in the universe? In striving to answer these questions and improve understanding of biological, planetary and cosmic phenomena and relationships among them, experts in a range of relevant disciplines are participating in astrobiology research and helping to advance the enterprise of space exploration.

PROGRAM

9-10 am:

Welcome by NASA and Lockheed Martin officials

Opening keynote address – *“Exobiology in the Beginning”* – **James Lovelock** and **Lynn Margulis**

Margulis and Lovelock were among the Exobiology Program’s earliest Principal Investigators. NASA supported Margulis’s work on symbiogenesis and Lovelock and Margulis’s work on the Gaia hypothesis. Their early research contributed to current understanding of how life evolved on Earth and how life and environment co-evolve.

10-11 am:

Panel 1, *“The Origins and Evolution of Exobiology and Astrobiology at NASA”* – **Steven Dick**, NASA Historian (ret.); **Baruch Blumberg**, Fox Chase Cancer Center; **Noel Hinners**, Lockheed Martin (ret.)

Moderator: Roger Launius, Dept. of Space History, National Air and Space Museum

11 am-noon:

Panel 2, *“Understanding the Origin, Evolution, and Distribution of Life in the Universe”* – **Jack Corliss**, Dept. of Environmental Sciences and Policy, Central European University; **Martin Brasier**, Dept. of Earth Sciences, University of Oxford; **Pamela Conrad**, Mars Science Laboratory team, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

Moderator: Lynn Rothschild, NASA Ames Research Center

Noon-1 pm:

Lunch – keynote address: *“Astrobiology in education and outreach to underrepresented communities”* – **Freeman Hrabowski**, President, U. Maryland-Baltimore County (invited)

1-2 pm:

Panel 3, *“Who Are We? Where Are We Going? Are We Alone? Astrobiology in Culture”* – **Marc Kaufman**, The Washington Post; **Connie Bertka**, Carnegie Institution (past director of the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion); **David Grinspoon**, Curator of Astrobiology, Denver Museum of Natural Science

Moderator: Linda Billings, School of Media and Public Affairs, George Washington University

2-3 pm: Panel 4, *“Homing in on ET Life: Where, and How, To Look”* – **Danny Glavin**, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center; **Vikki Meadows**, Virtual Planetary Laboratory, Dept. of Astronomy, U. of Washington; **Steve Benner**, Foundation for Applied Molecular Evolution

Moderator: Michael Meyer, Lead Scientist, Mars Exploration Program, NASA HQ

3-4 PM: Closing keynote address – *“The Next 50 Years”* – **Steve Squyres**, Dept. of Astronomy, Cornell University