National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Goddard View

Volume 11 Issue 10
November 2015

www.nasa.gov

GoddardView

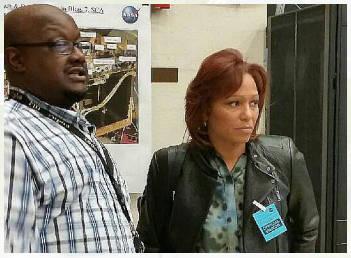
TRENDING

U.S. Senator From North Dakota Tours Goddard's Facilities

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp toured the center's facilities on Nov. 6. As North Dakota's first woman elected to the U.S. Senate, Heitkamp has worked to increase funding for collaborations between NASA and her state's universities.

Gamma-Ray Burst Mission Spots 1,000th Burst

The Swift spacecraft detected its 1,000th gamma-ray burst on Oct. 27, nearly 11 years after its launch. Managed by Goddard, the mission is operated in collaboration with several domestic and international partners.



Local Television Meteorologist Visits Goddard

Veronica Johnson, an award-winning meteorologist for the NBC television affiliate in Washington, D.C., toured several of Goddard's facilities to learn more about the center's work in climate research and other areas.

Employees Learn About Available Resources at Health Fair

In an effort to encourage healthier living and allow health and dental providers to present their available resources and plans, Goddard held its annual health fair for its employees on Nov. 12.

GoddardView

Trending – 2
NASA Engineers Find Their Way to Sesame Street – 3
Danny Glavin: Searching for Life in Antarctica – 4
Goddard Kicks Off Charitable Giving Campaign – 5
Weekly Snapshots on Science: 50 Years of the Goddard Scientific Colloquium – 7
Goddard Stars Come Out for White House Astronomy Night – 8
Employee Spotlight – 9
Goddard Honors Its Own on Veterans Day – 10
Astronomy on Tap: Because Science Is Better With Beer – 12

On the cover: NASA astronaut Scott Kelly returns inside the International Space Station after completing his first spacewalk.

Photo credit: NASA

NP-2015-9-336-GSFC

GoddardView Info

Goddard View is an official publication of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. Goddard View showcases people and achievements in the Goddard community that support the center's mission to explore, discover and understand our dynamic universe. Goddard View is published by the Goddard Office of Communications.

You may submit story ideas to the editor at darrell.d.delarosa@nasa.gov. All contributions are subject to editing and will be published as space allows.

CONTENTS

NASA ENGINEERS FIND THEIR WAY TO SESAME STREET

By Maria-Jose Vinas Garcia

Engineers Sandra Cauffman and Diana Trujillo have had distinguished careers working for NASA, and now they have one more item to add to their long list of accomplishments: leaving a Muppet starstruck.

On Nov. 10, Cauffman and Trujillo participated in an event organized by the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C., to promote early childhood education in mathematics and science in Latin America and the Caribbean. Lola, a pink, furry Muppet who stars in Plaza Sésamo – the Spanish-language production in Latin America of the popular children's television series Sesame Street – introduced Cauffman and Trujillo by saying they were two of her favorite superheroes.

"They know a lot, a lot about science and math," Lola said. "Knowing about those things is like having superpowers."

"If you think those are superpowers, any girl can have them," replied Trujillo, who works at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. But she explained that it wasn't easy for her to pursue her dreams of space exploration while growing up in Cali, Colombia.

"Colombia isn't a country that produces a lot of aerospace engineers, let alone female aerospace engineers," added Trujillo, who as a little girl yearned to find a fellow countrywoman who worked in the space industry and could serve as her role model. "Unfortunately, she didn't exist."

Still, Trujillo persevered. She moved to the United States and worked three jobs to put herself through college. Her break came when she was granted a competitive NASA Academy internship, which led to her first job at the agency. She is currently a mission lead and deputy team chief of engineering operations for the Curiosity rover on Mars.

Cauffman, deputy system program director for the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite - R Series at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, grew up poor in Costa Rica. Her single mother escaped abusive relationships and worked up to three jobs to support her children.

"I don't have many happy memories from my childhood, but one night stands out: July 20, 1969," Cauffman recalled. That night, she watched the historic Apollo 11 moon landing at a neighbor's house and became determined to work in space exploration.

With her mother's encouragement, Cauffman ended up going to college in her native country, but she had to battle gender stereotypes that dictated that a woman should not study electrical engineering. When her family moved to the United States, she finished college with a double major in electrical engineering and physics. Cauffman has worked at NASA for nearly 25 years, designing new missions for space exploration and engaging in many of the agency's science-related projects.

"The circumstances of your birth shouldn't dictate who you become," she added. "When I was 7, I wanted to go to the moon. I never went, but I've landed among the stars."

After their conversations with Lola, Cauffman and Trujillo participated in a panel discussion alongside IDB Vice President Santiago Levy and Sesame Workshop Latin America Regional Director Jorge Baxter. The four examined the important roles of parents and the media in encouraging young girls to study science and math.

"If we want to travel in space, we're going to need a lot of engineers – both men and women," Trujillo said.

There was at least one girl in the audience who was inspired.

"Now Lola wants to become not only a soccer player, and a president and a ballet dancer," Lola added. "She also wants to become a math teacher and an astronaut!" ■

Above: Sandra Cauffman (left) and Diana Trujillo – engineers from Goddard and JPL, respectively – pose with Muppet Lola from Plaza Sésamo.

Photo credit: NASA/Goddard/Bill Hrybyk

DANNY GLAVIN: SEARCHING FOR LIFE IN ANTARCTICA

By Elizabeth M. Jarrell

Danny Glavin looks for the building blocks of life in Antarctica's meteorites.

What do you do and what is most interesting about your role here at Goddard?

My job has two components. I'm the associate director for strategic science in the Goddard Solar System Exploration Division. I serve as a voice for our division's scientists. The second part of my job is astrobiology research. I study the organic composition of extraterrestrial materials, such as meteorites and interplanetary dust particles, which are pieces of asteroids and comets.

Why and how did you become an astrobiologist?

I graduated from the University of California at San Diego and got a NASA summer internship in exobiology, the study of the origin and evolution of life on Earth and the search for life elsewhere. During my internship, NASA announced that it had found signs of life in a Martian meteorite discovered in Antarctica. Soon after, NASA formed the Astrobiology Institute to help develop the field of astrobiology and future missions.

I quickly realized that I needed to learn organic chemistry if I wanted to get involved in searching for evidence of life on Mars. I took some organic and biochemistry courses at UCSD and then got into the Ph.D. program in earth sciences at its Scripps Institution of Oceanography. My supervisor during the summer internship became my Ph.D. advisor, who helped me get a NASA fellowship for graduate school.

Please tell us about your fieldwork in Antarctica.

In 2002, I spent nearly six weeks in Antarctica at a remote field camp in the MacAlpine Hills region of the Transantarctic Mountains. The Antarctic Search for Meteorites – a partnership between NASA, the National Science Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution and Case Western Reserve University in Ohio – sends a team of scientists, engineers, astronauts, writers, teachers and many other professionals to search for and collect meteorites from the ice using snowmobiles and by foot.

We go for the Antarctic summer, which is winter here. We leave around mid-November and return mid-January. During the Antarctic summer, there are 24 hours of daylight. The sun just circles above the horizon, which can make sleeping a challenge.

Our team of 12 recovered more than 900 meteorites and a few "meteo-wrongs," terrestrial rocks that we picked up by mistake. We bagged the rocks, labeled them, and put them into ice coolers to keep them organized and prevent contamination. We sent the rocks to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., where they are classified to determine their origin.

What was most exciting about doing fieldwork in Antarctica?

The biggest thrill for me was finding a football-size rock from space on top of the ice. Nobody else had likely ever seen this meteorite before. This rock turned out to be a piece of an asteroid, but not from Mars.

Are you planning to do more fieldwork in Antarctica?

There is a saying: "Every day you're in Antarctica, you think about the day when you're going to leave. And when you get back home, you spend every day thinking about how you're going to get back."

Who is the most interesting, inspiring or amazing person you have met or worked with at Goddard?

My former supervisor Paul Mahaffy showed me what it means to be a true leader. He encourages the scientists in his group to work independently and gives them opportunities to take on new challenges. He provides them with an environment in which they can grow and become leaders themselves.

What was one of the most surprising moments of your career?

I was very pleased and surprised when the International Astronomical Union named main belt asteroid 2000 WA$_{191}$ the 24480 Glavin. ■

Photo credit: NASA/Goddard/Danny Glavin

GODDARD KICKS OFF CHARITABLE GIVING CAMPAIGN

By Jenny Hottle

When a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, more than 250,000 people were killed and about 300,000 were injured. Nearly 1.5 million people lost their homes.

In the wake of the nation's deadliest disaster in modern history, nonprofit organizations from all over the world stepped up to provide temporary shelter, field hospitals and other relief for Haitian residents.

With his own family in need of help, Jean-Marie Jean-Pierre – assistant chief for acquisition in the information technology and communications directorate at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center – recalls how donations given through the Combined Federal Campaign helped the Caribbean country through one of its most trying times.

"A big part of my love for Goddard stems from the fact that so many employees contributed to help Haiti," said Jean-Pierre during Goddard's 2015 CFC kickoff event on Oct. 26. "Sometimes, it may be hard to relate to those who are impacted by life-changing events. We may never know such people personally or know their pain, but we must remember that one never knows what the future holds."

Through the annual charitable giving program, federal employees can donate money to more than 24,000 local, domestic and international charities. The campaign covers countless causes, including disaster relief, environmental protection, health care, housing and youth development.

The kickoff featured a skit by kindergarten students from the Goddard Child Development Center to encourage donations, as well as a raffle for University of Maryland Terrapins football tickets. Representatives from about 20 charities also spoke about their respective causes.

"These charities share a vision for making the world a safer and better place for all," said Annece Perry, CFC deputy executive director for the National Capital Area, which covers Washington, D.C., and surrounding areas in Maryland and Virginia. "Our theme is 'We Make It Possible,' because that's exactly what we do."

The early stages of the CFC began in 1961, when then-President John F. Kennedy authorized the U.S. Civil Service Commission to develop guidelines and regulate fundraising in the federal service. In 1982, an executive order from then-President Ronald Reagan created the modern CFC under the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

The CFC has raised more than $7 billion to date. Goddard employees raised $492,000 in 2014, and this year the center has set a fundraising goal of at least $495,000.

"This is a time when the Goddard community shows its generosity and compassion for others," said Center Director Chris Scolese.

The 2015 campaign runs through Dec. 15. Contributions are tax-deductible and entirely voluntary.

"This is our opportunity to extend our civil servant duties further by giving back to the charities that we are passionate about," added Myra Bambacus, Goddard's CFC campaign manager.

In addition to the kickoff, Goddard held a football bash on Nov. 13 featuring a live band, a charity fair, and a raffle for Baltimore Ravens and Navy Football tickets. Donations for the event were given to CFC-sponsored charities. ■

For more information on the Combined Federal Campaign, visit the website of the Combined Federal Campaign of the National Capital Area at www.cfcnca.org.

Above: Charities speak about their causes during the Goddard kickoff event for the Combined Federal Campaign.

Photo credit: NASA/Goddard/Bill Hrybyk

WEEKLY SNAPSHOTS ON SCIENCE: 50 YEARS OF THE GODDARD SCIENTIFIC COLLOQUIUM

By Ashley Morrow

On Nov. 4, with many of the brightest minds at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in attendance, National Institutes of Health geneticist Julie Segre explained how she is studying hundreds of thousands – or maybe even millions – of microbes that live on each centimeter of the surface of human skin.

One wouldn't normally expect genomics to be the lead topic of a presentation at a NASA center, but for the past 50 years the Goddard Scientific Colloquium hasn't limited itself to space exploration. Started by Goddard astrophysicist Jaylee Mead in September 1965, the colloquium has welcomed more than 1,600 scientists from various fields during its half-century in existence.

"The Goddard Scientific Colloquium has always been intended as a Goddard-wide program for all science, not just the science we do at Goddard," said David Thompson, Fermi deputy project scientist and chair of the colloquium's committee. "We've had speakers in mathematics and physics and chemistry and medicine, history of science, humor. It's always been fascinating to invite scientists outside my own field and learn something from them."

Twice a year, the colloquium's 12-person committee meets to select speakers. The only criterion is that they're able to give a good scientific talk. Committee members nominate scientists they've read about in the newspaper, from talks they've seen at conferences, and even from talks they've seen on YouTube. Then, the committee votes. Not every selected speaker elects to travel to Goddard to speak, but most do.

Thirty-six Nobel laureates have spoken to date – including Goddard's own John Mather – as well as some world-renowned scientists like astronomer Carl Sagan and paleontologist Louis Leakey.

And many big names choose to come because of Goddard's reputation, according to committee member Hans Krimm. "Some of these people came before they were famous, granted, but they can pick and choose where they go," he said. "These people can make many times what we are able to give them for their speeches, but they came here, which really speaks to the cachet of Goddard."

For the most part, the committee invites speakers from traditional scientific fields. Presentations in space science, Earth science, planetary science, life science and physics make up 91 percent of the talks. The committee, however, often takes a broader view of what constitutes science. When Krimm suggested a lexicographer as a speaker several years ago, it could have been controversial. Lexicographers primarily compile dictionaries.

"Dave agreed with me that lexicography is a science – the science of words and how they're used and how they change," Krimm said. "That was a fascinating colloquium."

In addition to providing an avenue to learn about the science being undertaken outside of Goddard, the colloquium gives the center's scientists and others an opportunity to interact with their counterparts across the country and around the world. Segre drove to Goddard from her NIH office in Bethesda, Maryland, but some fly in and stay a few days.

"It gives us a chance to improve the interactions of the Goddard scientific community with people outside the gates," said Thompson.

And for many who have retired from Goddard over the past 50 years, the colloquium is an outlet that allows them to remain engaged with their scientific passion.

"They say that this is somewhere they can keep up on interesting science," Thompson added. ■

For more information on the Goddard Scientific Colloquium and a schedule of speakers, visit the colloquium's website at scicolloq.gsfc.nasa.gov.

Center: Lexicographer Erin McKean (right) stands next to Goddard Scientific Colloquium committee member Hans Krimm following her talk. Photo courtesy: NASA/Goddard/Hans Krimm

Opposite, top: Astrophysicist and Goddard Scientific Colloquium founder Jaylee Mead (second from right) speaks with then-Center Director John F. Clark (left), Apollo 15 Commander David R. Scott (second from left) and then-committee member Bevan French following Scott's colloquium presentation on March 14, 1972. Photo credit: NASA

Opposite, bottom: Renowned paleontologist Louis Leakey speaks at the Goddard Scientific Colloquium on Oct. 5, 1971. Photo credit: NASA

GODDARD STARS COME OUT FOR WHITE HOUSE ASTRONOMY NIGHT

By Sarah Frazier

On the South Lawn of the most famous address in America, with its most famous resident in attendance, astronomers-to-be met with astronomers of the present to spend an evening stargazing and learning about the science of space. Hosted by President Barack Obama on Oct. 19, the second White House Astronomy Night welcomed students, teachers, astronauts, scientists and NASA personnel from across the country – including several from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

"I would have been super jazzed to be invited to an event like this as a kid," said Alex Young, associate director for science in the Goddard Heliophysics Science Division. "Even as an adult, I was pretty jazzed."

Along with Troy Cline, education and public outreach mission lead for the Magnetospheric Multiscale mission, Young presented virtual views of Mars and MMS spacecraft using virtual reality headsets. Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff, was among the attendees who participated in the experience.

Other featured heliophysics missions included NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory and NASA's Interface Region Imaging Spectrograph. Noah Petro, deputy project scientist for the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, represented the robotic mission.

Three members of the Goddard Astronomy Club – Joe Novotka, Allison Evans and Raul Riveros – provided telescopes to help stargazers get a closer look at objects in the night sky, including the moon, the Andromeda Galaxy and the Double Cluster, a pair of open star clusters located in the Perseus constellation.

"We enjoyed hearing the school children's reactions to seeing the moon and stars through a telescope for their very first time," said Novotka, the club's president.

Additional activities promoted the importance of education in STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – fields to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. As part of its commitment to increasing STEM participation, the White House announced during the event that NASA will work with students and citizen scientists to scout targets for the James Webb Space Telescope, which is set to be the most powerful space telescope ever built upon its completion in 2018. Obama also praised NASA's goal to put humans on Mars by the 2030s.

"As our nation continues along our Journey to Mars, it is absolutely essential that more and more of our fellow citizens study the 'STEM' disciplines," said NASA Deputy Administrator Dava Newman, who was also in attendance.

In conjunction with the event, many schools and organizations across the country hosted their own astronomy nights. For its part, the White House gathering had many eager minds excited about what NASA and others are doing to advance space exploration.

"It was a great environment," added Young. "Everyone was really excited to be there learning about science." ■

Above: White House Astronomy Night participants examine images of the sun from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory. Photo credit: White House

Below: Goddard's Troy Cline (left) and Alex Young try on virtual reality headsets during White House Astronomy Night. Photo credit: NASA/Goddard/Troy Cline

Victor Mask

Code 830, Quality Assurance Manager/ Ground Safety Officer

Why Goddard?: To be part of a team that can make a difference!

Hobbies/interests: family, reading

JaeSun Riley

Code 210.I, Contract Specialist

Why Goddard?: I've been interested in the work that NASA does since I was a kid.

Hobbies/interests: travel, food, bicycling, D.C. sports

Hanh Nguyen

Code 155.2, Financial Management Specialist

Why Goddard?: It provides a great work environment that allows me to pursue new opportunities and challenges.

Hobbies/interests: tennis, bicycling

Clare Skelly

Code 130, Pathways Intern; Office of Communications

Why Goddard?: To share the NASA mission and inform the public about the great projects and people at the agency.

Hobbies/interests: baking, crafting, tennis, outdoors

Ryan Kent

Code 541, Pathways Intern; Materials Engineering Branch

Why Goddard?: Did you know they do space here? That sealed the deal right there.

Hobbies/interests: climbing, caves, scuba, quantum mechanics

Tammy Sheppard

Code 800, Pathways Intern; Workforce Development

Why Goddard?: I have wanted to work for NASA since I was a child, and what better NASA center to work for than Goddard?

Hobbies/interests: rocketry, softball, long-distance running, CrossFit

Carlos Vazquez

Code 596, Student Trainee (Engineering)

Why Goddard?: Goddard was the best match to go with my education and career goals.

Hobbies/interests: YouTube, green energy, museums

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

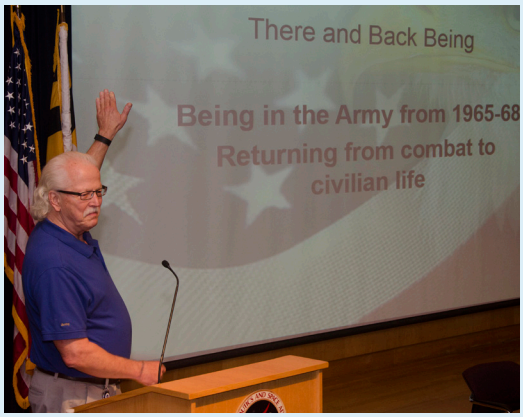
Goddard is pleased to welcome these new employees to the NASA community.

GODDARD HONORS ITS

By Jenny Hottle and Clare Skelly

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, a declared cease-fire ended World War I. Previously recognized as Armistice Day, Nov. 11 resurged in the 1970s as Veterans Day — a federal holiday dedicated to American veterans of all wars.

Veterans of every U.S. military branch work at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center — in administration, scientific research, engineering, facilities management and many other roles. In observance of Veterans Day, the Goddard Veterans Advisory Committee held a panel discussion on Nov. 10 with seven Goddard employees sharing their military experiences and thoughts on being veterans.



Stanley "Stosh" Comisiak is a licensed professional counselor who was worked for more than 20 years in the Goddard Employee Assistance Program. He is a U.S. Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1968. Before arriving at Goddard, Comisiak worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Gallery of Art, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal agencies.

"I've seen people go into situations courageously. When veterans commit to do something, we are there. We will do what we have to do. We may look back at it later and shiver and shake. But during that time, we will be there."

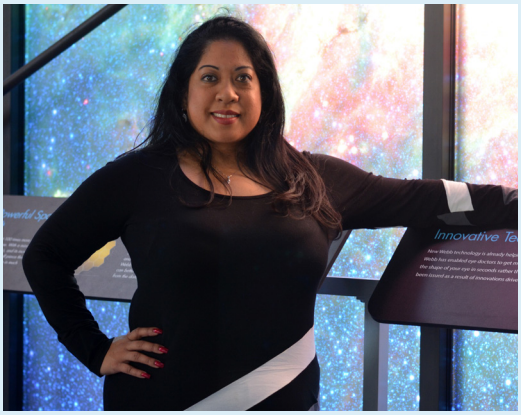
Pat Michael's 32-year career in the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy has taken him to every continent except Antarctica. The deputy manager for the Goddard Crustal Dynamics Data Information System, Michael first came to Goddard as a graduate student and returned as a civil servant after finishing a tour in Afghanistan in 2013. He is currently a reservist in the Navy and typically works in his military job six or more weeks a year.

"I don't look upon myself as a hero. I lost six colleagues during a tour in Afghanistan. Those are the real heroes. I carry around a picture in my wallet to remind me that it's not about me. It's about others."

Eric Holmes is a facility operations specialist. He retired from the U.S. Air Force after 25 years of service as a combat engineer. Holmes and his comrades were trained to build anything from field hospitals to runways, often in hostile environments.

"One of the most powerful military forces in the world is made up of all volunteers. These men and women are willing to offer themselves, their lives and the lives of their families. My family has to support me when I'm gone and deal with the unforeseen things that may come up. Veterans Day is a chance to promote a certain kind of recognition. Veterans are recognized for their service and the people who want to celebrate them have a chance to do that as well."

OWN ON VETERANS DAY



Elizabeth Harley is a customer service specialist with the Goddard Customer Service Office. She served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 17 years, including three combat tours in Iraq. She has worked at Goddard for about 13 years.

"I was going through some old letters that my daughter's class wrote me when I was in Iraq. A 10-year-old wrote about how it must have taken a lot to give up everything just to protect us. That was very profound for me. I said, 'Wow, this 10-year-old gets it.' That's what validates me to do what I do. When I was in Iraq, that motivated me to finish what I needed to finish and to come home safely to my family."

Ross Bagwell, a senior systems engineer for the Goddard Earth Science Data and Information System, served in the military for 28 years. After graduating from high school, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps for eight years before transferring to the U.S. Army. Over the course of his military career, Bagwell traveled to 30 countries around the world.

"We are supposed to remember to thank the veterans for the kinds of sacrifices we do to keep the freedoms we enjoy. I always thank people when they thank me. It may seem weird, but I am thanking them because they took the time to thank me for my service. Does that make sense?"

Tyrone Dillard is the chief safety and mission assurance officer for the Ionospheric Connection Explorer and the Global-scale Observations of the Limb and Disk mission. He served two combat deployments in Iraq over five years in the U.S. Marine Corps. Since opting out in 2006, Tyrone has completed two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree in engineering while working for NASA, including a stint as a mission assurance engineer for several projects.

"I believe that it is imperative that veterans be acknowledged not only for their contributions to warfighting efforts overseas but also for their contributions to many intellectual trains of thought."

Tupper Hyde is the chief of the Goddard Mission Engineering and Systems Analysis Division. He is also a lieutenant colonel and space intelligence officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. He served on active duty in the Army Field Artillery branch in the early 1990s. He holds 10 patents and has received numerous awards, including the Robert H. Goddard Exceptional Achievement Award for Leadership.

"Leadership is the same whether you're leading in the military or in your civilian job. The mission comes first and your people come first. Lessons carry over into NASA leadership." ■

Photo credits: NASA/Goddard/Jay Friedlander and Jenny Hottle

Astronomy on Tap: Because Science Is Better With Beer

By Stephanie LaMassa

On a rainy Wednesday night in Washington, D.C., a packed crowd of space enthusiasts sipped on libations as the universe unfurled before them. “Bingo!” an excited voice called out, startling some while eliciting laughter from others. The event: Astronomy on Tap, a public outreach series featuring professional astronomers and educators giving short, accessible talks in a bar.

With scientists stepping onto a stage normally reserved for live bands and karaoke, the inaugural Astronomy on Tap – DC series began on Oct. 28 at The Wonderland Ballroom in the city’s Columbia Heights neighborhood. Speakers for the evening included two astronomers from NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. Brian Williams discussed ancient supernovae in the age of modern astronomy, while Martha Boyer shared the origin of stardust. Erika Nesvold, an astronomer at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Washington, talked about destroying virtual asteroids as part of her work in computational astronomy.

The audience was encouraged to ask questions after each talk by trading their inquiries for glowsticks, illuminating the room with splashes of color as the night progressed. Attendees also had the chance to win prizes – including posters, stickers, pins, Hubble Space Telescope photos, temporary tattoos, and lenticular postcards and bookmarks – by playing “astronomy bingo,” in which bingo cards were filled with key terms and phrases used by the speakers.

The intimacy of the setting encouraged the public to approach speakers, according to Boyer. “My favorite part was the opportunity to mingle with the audience afterwards over drinks,” she said.

Williams agreed with her sentiment. “I had several strangers come up to me after my talk with questions about all sorts of stuff in astronomy, so it was cool to be able to interact with people in an informal environment,” he added.

Astronomy on Tap started in 2012 under a slightly different guise. Meg Schwamb, then an astronomy postdoctoral fellow at Yale University, began what was called “Astronomy Uncorked” in a local wine bar in New Haven, Connecticut.

After several successful gatherings, Schwamb asked City University of New York astronomers Emily Rice and Kelle Cruz in April 2013 to start something similar in the city. Rebranded as “Astronomy on Tap,” the event changed its venue to a pub to allow for greater accessibility to a wider audience. Two and a half years later, satellite Astronomy on Tap events have sprung up in multiple cities worldwide, both as recurring series and one-off events, including one in Washington, D.C., in 2014.

Rice, who continues to run Astronomy on Tap – NYC with American Museum of Natural History educator Brian Levine, credits the grassroots nature of Astronomy on Tap for its success. “The presenters have freedom and creativity to experiment with new ways of sharing their passion for science,” she said.

While different locations have their unique settings – with venues ranging from high-capacity “edu-tainment” centers to local breweries and community dive bars – one common thread ties these events together: a love for astronomy and a desire to share this excitement with the public by talking to attendees instead of lecturing at them.

"For presenters, Astronomy on Tap is a really fun setting," added Boyer. “The crowd was energetic and enthusiastic, but also relaxed." ■

Stephanie LaMassa is a postdoctoral program fellow in the Observational Cosmology Laboratory at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. She organized Astronomy on Tap – CT in New Haven, Ct., for a year and a half. She started Astronomy on Tap – DC upon relocating to Washington.

Astronomy on Tap – DC is a recurring event with gatherings every other month. Gatherings feature Goddard scientists as well as those from other institutions. For more information, visit www.astronomyontap.org. To learn about upcoming events in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, send an email to AstroOnTapDC@gmail.com.

Center: Goddard scientist Martha Boyer speaks to attendees at The Wonderland Ballroom during the inaugural gathering of Astronomy on Tap – DC.

Photo credit: Nathan Secrest