



News Release

CONTACT:

Heidi Hammel, Space Science Institute, (203) 438-3506

hbh@alum.mit.edu

Ellis D. Miner, DPS/AAS, (818) 354-4450

Ellis.D.Miner@jpl.nasa.gov

Preston Dyches, Space Science Institute, (303) 492-3774

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SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE RESEARCHER RECEIVES 2002 CARL SAGAN MEDAL

Heidi Hammel, a senior research scientist with the Space Science Institute in Boulder, Colorado has been awarded this year's prestigious Carl Sagan Medal by the Division for Planetary Sciences of the American Astronomical Society.

The Space Science Institute, or SSI, is a non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Colorado that serves as a hub for creative, mutually beneficial partnerships among the science, education and business communities at local, regional and national levels.

The Sagan Medal is awarded to a scientist each year whose efforts have significantly contributed to public understanding of, and enthusiasm for, planetary science. The award commemorates the career of Carl Sagan, who touched millions of lives with his books and the television series "Cosmos."

Hammel's research focuses primarily on the giant outer planets and their satellites. She is an acknowledged expert about the planet Neptune, and was a member of the Imaging Science Team for the Voyager 2 encounter with that planet in 1989. She has imaged Neptune and Uranus with the Hubble Space Telescope, and is part of a group working to develop the Next Generation Space Telescope for NASA.

"Hammel's dedication to communicating the excitement of planetary science is evident in the large number of lectures to children and the general public that have complemented her scientific career," said the American Astronomical Society Newsletter, announcing the award, "She has a talent for understandable and enthusiastic descriptions of scientific results."

Hammel chooses education and public outreach projects that parallel her research in order to get the most out of both experiences. One such endeavor was a program called "Live from the Hubble Space Telescope" which directly involved school children in making planetary observations with the orbiting observatory.

"Getting science out of the ivory tower and into the public realm is one of the most important and exciting things a scientist can do," said Hammel. "I try to reach out to kids, especially girls, who may not have realized that science and engineering are careers they might pursue."

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SAGAN AWARD/2

Hammel was made a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2000. In addition to the Sagan Medal, she also received the Division for Planetary Sciences' Urey Prize in 1996.

Hammel has been cited previously for her work in public outreach, winning the Astronomical Society of the Pacific's 1995 Klumpke-Roberts Award for public understanding and appreciation of astronomy; the 1996 Spirit of American Women National Award for encouraging young women to follow non-traditional career paths; and the Exploratorium's 1998 Public Understanding of Science Award.

Asteroid "1981 EC20" has been renamed "3530 Hammel" in her honor.

The Sagan Medal winner will present a talk at the society's annual meeting, to be held this October in Birmingham, Alabama.

"I'm delighted to have the opportunity to directly address my peers," Hammel said. "I hope to communicate the need for more scientist participation in education and public outreach, and to enlighten scientists about the variety of different ways they can become involved."

Hammel is not the first scientist from a Boulder institute to receive the Sagan Medal. Clark Chapman, a scientist with Boulder's Southwest Research Institute, was given the award in 1999.

The Space Science Institute's research program includes Earth science, space physics, planetary science and astrophysics. Working closely with both the scientific research community and educators, SSI has successfully produced engaging and informative science exhibits. SSI also provides professional development for teachers, conducts education workshops for scientists who are interested in education, and creates instructional materials and classroom activities that are aligned with national education standards.

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*Space Science Institute
3100 Marine Street
Suite A353
Boulder, CO 80303-1058
(303) 492-3774
www.spacescience.org*