



News Release

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SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE CELEBRATES 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

In September of this year, the Space Science Institute of Boulder, Colo. will celebrate ten years of operations. The Institute is a nonprofit organization with the unique mission to integrate world-class scientific research with innovative education and public outreach programs.

The Institute was founded by Paul Dusenbery, who worked for many years as a researcher in space physics at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the University of Colorado before joining the National Science Foundation as a program officer in the atmospheric sciences division. As a result of his experiences in science and education, Dusenbery realized there was an important connection to be made between space science research and the public.

“I came to believe strongly that the scientific research enterprise must not be practiced in isolation from the public that supports entities such as NASA and the National Science Foundation,” he said. Dusenbery decided to form an organization that would create bridges between the world of cutting edge research and the multi-faceted realm of engaging and enlightening science communication, including science education.

Once this idea had taken root, Dusenbery formed a board of directors and worked with them to create the Space Science Institute, or SSI. SSI began operations at the University of Colorado’s Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics in 1994. Since that time, SSI has maintained a strong affiliation with CU-Boulder.

Today SSI has 37 employees – 28 at its Boulder headquarters and 9 offsite researchers. For offsite personnel, SSI provides an attractive alternative to working in a university or government laboratory setting. The Institute gives these scientists the ability to live and carry out their research in locations of their choice. Recent advances in computer power and networking have facilitated this type of arrangement. In fact, one SSI offsite researcher is building a cluster of computer servers in his home which will rival the power of supercomputers from just a few years ago.

In August 2003, SSI moved to its current 10,000 square-foot headquarters. The change in office space was vital in order to accommodate the arrival and integration of the Cassini Imaging Central Laboratory for Operations (CICLOPS), the center of uplink and downlink operations for the imaging team on NASA’s Cassini mission to Saturn. The CICLOPS laboratory processes Cassini images that are released to the public and archives them for study by mission scientists. CICLOPS is directed by Dr. Carolyn Porco who is also the leader of the Cassini imaging team.

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SSI's research program includes Earth science, space physics, planetary science and astrophysics. Its research staff includes experts who study asteroids, planetary rings and atmospheres, the geology of Mars and the formation and evolution of star systems. SSI researchers have participated in many NASA missions, and are involved in ongoing and future missions. These programs include: NASA's twin rovers that currently are exploring the surface of Mars, the James Webb Space Telescope – NASA's next large space observatory scheduled for launch next decade, the highly successful Spitzer infrared space telescope and the aforementioned Cassini mission to Saturn. The research group is headed by Dr. Heidi Hammel and Dr. Todd Clancy.

SSI's education programs benefit greatly from the active involvement of research scientists from within SSI and elsewhere. Strategic partnerships (both locally and nationally) allow the Institute to take full educational advantage of the most recent scientific discoveries and missions. SSI's director of Education and Public Outreach is Dr. Cherilynn Morrow.

The Institute produces successful, nationally touring science exhibitions: the 5,000 square foot "MarsQuest" exhibit takes visitors on a tour of the Red Planet; a new exhibit called "Alien Earths" shares the excitement of the search for extrasolar planets and will begin a three-year national tour in early 2005; and the National Science Foundation recently awarded \$1.8 Million to SSI for the development and fabrication of the "Giant Planets" exhibit, which will capitalize on the public's interest in the Cassini mission.

SSI produces educational Web sites – such as marsquestonline.org and spaceweathercenter.org – as well as curriculum materials for educators. The Institute also is a national leader in conducting workshops for scientists and teachers. These diverse programs support SSI's mission of forging links between research and education.

"The past year has been exceptional for SSI," says Dusenbery, "with our involvement in several important space missions and our strong education program, we are well-positioned to face our second decade."

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