



News Release

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SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE RECEIVES \$1.8 MILLION NSF GRANT FOR GIANT PLANETS EXHIBIT

The Space Science Institute of Boulder, Colo. has been awarded \$1.8 Million from the National Science Foundation to develop a traveling science exhibition focused on the colossal gaseous worlds that orbit our Sun: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

“Giant Planets: Exploring the Outer Solar System” will be a 3,500 square-foot exhibit that explores the mysteries of these fascinating worlds: hurricanes that last for centuries; a moon that harbors a vast ocean beneath its icy surface; and magnetic environments that can generate massive storms of charged particles. Using a variety of hands-on activities, the exhibit will bring planetary science and research topics, such as the origins of the Solar System, to students and the public. Giant Planets will begin a three-year national tour in 2007, and will reach an estimated 1 million visitors.

Giant Planets will take advantage of the excitement generated by NASA’s Cassini mission to Saturn. The exhibit will include a number of interactive components that incorporate data, imagery and animations from the Pioneer, Voyager, Galileo, and Cassini missions. The exhibit project will serve one of the primary goals of the Space Science Institute, or SSI – to strengthen the connection between scientific research programs and education and public outreach. “We’re very excited about this project, since the central laboratory for the Cassini imaging team is part of SSI,” said Lisa Curtis, Exhibits Manager for SSI.

Two of the Institute’s research scientists will participate in the project: Dr. Heidi Hammel, an expert on the atmospheres of Uranus and Neptune, who also serves as the Interdisciplinary Scientist for the James Webb Space Telescope, will be the project’s science coordinator; Dr. Carolyn Porco, who leads the Cassini Imaging Team will be a science advisor to the project.

Giant Planets will include a unique exhibit area, created especially for younger visitors and their caregivers, called “Make Space for Kids”. This area will be colorful, brightly lit and focused primarily on movement-based experiences that will appeal to 5 to 8 year olds. Children will be able to climb on a large model of Saturn that can also be used for floor demonstrations. They will also explore and discover relationships between light and shadow and learn the differences between stars and planets.

SSI will collaborate with educators and scientists to create a complimentary education program that expands the impact of the exhibit through workshops for museum docents and teachers, as well as public lectures by planetary

scientists. SSI will also create a Web site for the project that will extend the scope and reach of the exhibit and provide resources for the education program.

The Space Science Institute is a nonprofit organization with the unique mission to integrate world-class scientific research with education and public outreach. Research scientists participate directly in the Institute's education programs, such as its traveling exhibits and Web sites, which bring current science to the public and educators.

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