

Media Relations

October 6, 2014

NASA Scientist Headlines UNH's Astronomy Fest Oct. 17 - 18

DURHAM, N.H. — The University of New Hampshire's 4th annual New England Fall Astronomy Festival (NEFAF) kicks off Friday October 17 at 7 p.m. with a keynote lecture by Carolyn Porco, leader of the imaging science team for NASA's Cassini mission to Saturn. The free, family-friendly festival is Oct. 17 and 18, 2014, at the [UNH Observatory](#) on Spinney Lane, on the west edge of the UNH campus.

[Porco](#) will detail the work of and stunning imagery captured by the Cassini spacecraft, which entered into Saturn's orbit in the summer of 2004. The landing of the spacecraft's Huygens probe on the cold, dark equatorial plains of Saturn's moon Titan, and Cassini's subsequent decade-long exploration of the Saturnian environment have become the stuff of legend. There will be a question-and-answer session immediately following Porco's talk as well as the opportunity to meet informally with the NASA scientist.

The multifaceted [NEFAF](#) gathers astronomers of all ages and experiences for lectures, demonstrations, games, crafts and celestial observing. Following Porco's keynote speech, attendees can partake in a guided tour of the heavens from astronomers at the UNH Observatory on Spinney Lane in Durham until midnight (weather permitting).

The festival picks up again Saturday morning at 10 a.m. with a variety of activities that span the entire day and include hands-on science activities, children's games, informal science talks geared for the public, a rocket display, safe solar observing, and a telescope clinic where anyone with a neglected telescope can get free advice on how to operate and enjoy their scope.

From 1 to 2 p.m., Sandy Fletcher '95G, a UNH alumna and now a NASA flight controller and astronaut trainer in the Extra-Vehicular Activity (EVA) Division at NASA's Johnson Space Flight Center in Houston, Texas, will give a talk titled, "U.S. Spacewalks—Past, Present, and Future of American EVAs." There will be other speakers during the day on Saturday from noon until 5:00 p.m.

Weather permitting, the festival will continue into the night under the stars with short, informal talks on celestial mythology and how to find your way around the sky, all led by UNH Observatory staff and amateur astronomers from The New Hampshire Astronomical Society (NHAS), The Astronomical Society of Northern New England, and Gloucester Area Astronomy Club.

"Through these annual festivals we hope to inspire and engage the next generation of scientists and engineers," says festival co-organizer Ian Cohen, a UNH Ph.D. physics student and manager of the UNH Observatory. Adds co-organizer John Gianforte, UNH adjunct astronomy instructor and editor at Sky and Telescope magazine, "NEFAF brings world-class scientists, journalists and astronauts to UNH to share the wonders of our universe with students of all ages."

The festival, hosted by the UNH physics department in partnership with the NHAS, is organized and staffed by professional and amateur astronomers from throughout the region.

The [event](#) is again free to all guests thanks to generous funding by Beswick Engineering, the University of New Hampshire, the UNH Physics Department, the UNH Space Science Center, the New Hampshire Space Grant Consortium, the UNH Alumni Association, the UNH Parents Association, BAE Systems, the FlatBread Company, and Margaritas. Food will be available for purchase.

For more on keynote speaker Carolyn Porco, visit <http://carolynporco.com/about/biography/>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

Photographs to download:

<http://www.unh.edu/news/releases/2014/10/images/carolynporco-9440.jpg>

Carolyn Porco, leader of the imaging science team for NASA's Cassini mission to Saturn, headlines the University of New Hampshire's New England Fall Astronomy Festival Oct. 17 and 18, 2014

<http://www.unh.edu/news/releases/2014/10/images/sandyfletcher-3238.jpg>

UNH alumna Sandy Fletcher '95G, a NASA flight controller and astronaut trainer, will speak at UNH's New England Fall Astronomy Festival Saturday, Oct. 18, at 1 p.m.

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Media Contact: [David Sims](#) | 603-862-5369 | Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space

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