

APR05-2005-000319

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the APR05 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Communicating Science through Exhibitions

PAUL DUSENBERY, Space Science Institute

It is critically important for the public to better understand the scientific process. Museum exhibitions are an important part of informal science education that can effectively reach public audiences as well as school groups. They provide an important gateway for the public to learn about compelling scientific endeavors. Science exhibitions also provide a marvelous opportunity for scientists to become engaged in the exhibit development process. The Space Science Institute (SSI) is a national leader in producing traveling science exhibitions and their associated educational programming (i.e. interactive websites, educator workshops, public talks, instructional materials). The focus of this presentation will be on two of its exhibit projects: MarsQuest (on tour for four years) and Alien Earths (its tour began early in 2005). MarsQuest is enabling millions of Americans to share in the excitement of the scientific exploration of Mars and to learn more about their own planet in the process. Alien Earths will bring origins-related research and discoveries to students and the American public. It has four interrelated exhibit areas: Our Place in Space, Star Birth, Planet Quest, and Search for Life. Exhibit visitors will explore the awesome events surrounding the birth of stars and planets; they will join scientists in the hunt for planets outside our solar system including those that may be in “habitable zones” around other stars; and finally they will be able to learn about how scientists are looking for signs of life beyond Earth. SSI is also developing interactive web sites based on exhibit themes. New technologies are transforming the Web from a static medium to an interactive environment with tremendous potential for informal education and inquiry-based investigations. This talk will focus on the role informal science projects play in effectively communicating science to a broad, public audience.