



News

For the attention of: news editors

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The Open University shares global award for space exploration

The Cassini-Huygens mission including 15 people from The Open University will receive the 2006 “Laurels for Team Achievement Award” from the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA). The award will be presented at an IAA meeting in Valencia, Spain on Sunday, October 1 2006.

Cassini-Huygens’ successful completion of its seven-year, two billion-mile journey in January 2005 to Saturn ended with Huygens landing farther away from Earth than any previous probe or craft in the history of space exploration . The first instrument to touch Saturn’s moon Titan soil was the Surface Science Package containing nine sensors to investigate the physical properties of Titan’s surface. It was built by a team at the Open University.

The OU’s Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute played a vital role in the European Space Agency/NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory expedition, with the Huygens Surface Science Package recording properties of the landing site and the atmosphere. The PSSRI team also contributed to a Cosmic Dust Analyser on Cassini and the Huygen’s probe’s “accelerometry subsystem” which determined the density of the Titan’s upper atmosphere.

The IAA citation says:

“From its spectacular launch to its breakthrough science return Cassini-Huygens has continually captured the public imagination and provided the scientific community with a tool of unprecedented discovery. The epochal landing of the Huygens probe on the surface of Titan and the continuous sustaining discoveries of Cassini of the Saturn planetary system with its rings and moons will go into history as one of the milestones in the exploration of our solar system. This is made possible by the team of scientists,

engineers, managers, and support staff from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the European Space Agency who have dedicated their careers to this purpose. “

– International Academy of Astronautics

Previous winners include the Russian MIR Space Station, NASA's Space Shuttle and the Hubble Space Telescope.

OU Professor of Space Science and Director of Centre for Earth, Planetary, Space and Astronomical Research (CEPSAR) John Zarnecki, the lead scientist on the Huygens mission will give the IAA an overview of the science gained from the Surface Science Package.

“It has been suggested, “ Professor Zarnecki said, “that the success of the entire mission was the dawn of a new Age of Discovery. Indeed what the entire Cassini-Huygens team accomplished, some of us over a period of 15 years or more, is leading us to ever-expanding discoveries beyond just the landing and photographs. We are all in awe of having been a part of this new threshold of discovery already rich in scientific treasure.”

Editor's Notes

The Open University members of the Huygens team are: Prof. John C. Zarnecki ,Mr Mark R. Leese, Mr Brijen Hathi,,Dr Axel Hagermann, Dr Martin C. Towner, Dr Andrew J. Ball, Dr Manish R. Patel, Dr Tim J. Ringrose, Mr Phil D. Rosenberg, Mr Karl Atkinson, Dr Simon F. Green, Dr Neil McBride, Dr Jon K. Hillier, Dr James P. Schwanethal and Prof. Tony McDonnell.

Resources

Web

<http://iaaweb.org/content/view/134/232/>

<http://cepsar.open.ac.uk/index.htm>

<http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Cassini-Huygens/index.html>

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/cassini/main/index.html

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