

Public Engagement with the Lunar and Planetary Institute. A. J. Shaner¹, C. Shupla¹, K. LaConte¹, A. Hackler¹, Y. Ballard¹, S. Buxner², M. Wenger², E. Joseph², ¹USRA – Lunar and Planetary Institute, 3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058, ²Planetary Science Institute, 1700 East Fort Lowell, Suite 106, Tucson, AZ 85719.

Introduction: The Lunar and Planetary Institute's (LPI) public engagement programs target audiences of all ages and backgrounds. The Institute's current suite of public engagement activities is accessible to members of the public in the community immediately surrounding LPI as well as the larger Houston metropolitan area. The purpose of LPI's public engagement activities are to inform, and engage the public in, current earth/space science and exploration. The LPI's flagship engagement programs are the Cosmic Explorations Speaker Series and Sky Fest.

Cosmic Explorations Speaker Series: Initiated in 2008, LPI's Cosmic Explorations Speaker Series (CESS) is an annual public speaker series meant to engage the public in space science and exploration. Each thematic series includes four to five presentations held between September and May. Past series' titles have included "Science" on the Silver Screen, *The Universe is Out to Get Us and What We Can (or Can't) Do About It*, and *A User's Guide to the Universe: You Live Here. Here's What You Need to Know*. The objectives of the CESS are to:

1. Inform the Clear Lake/Houston community about Earth/space science and exploration.
2. Build awareness of and advocacy for Earth/space science and exploration.
3. Provide an experience that supports audience interest in Earth/space science and exploration.
4. Increase awareness of the LPI's public activities within the Clear Lake/Houston community.

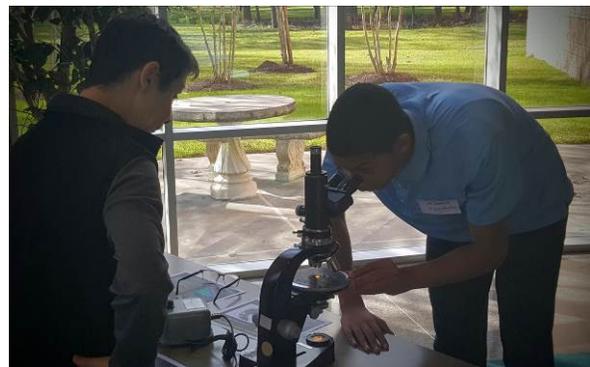
CESS presentations are recorded and archived on LPI's YouTube channel. LPI plans to begin live streaming CESS presentations in 2016.



InSight PI Dr. Bruce Banerdt speaks to CESS attendees in November 2015.

Evaluation. Formal evaluation data collection began with the 2013-2014 series. Data collection occurs following each presentation when attendees are asked to complete a nine-item survey. Attendees have the option of completing a paper survey or an electronic survey on a tablet via Survey Monkey[®]. The evaluation of the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 series has demonstrated that the program is successfully meeting all stated objectives and the series are consistently rated highly by visitors as interesting and valuable experiences. Over the last two series, and during the current series, attendance has averaged approximately 200 people per presentation.

Sky Fest: Sky Fest events are held four to five times a year. These events each have a science content theme and include several activities for children and their parents, night sky viewing through telescopes, and scientist presentations. Themes include both planetary and astronomy topics as well as planetary exploration topics (e.g., celebrating the launch or landing of a spacecraft). One of the most well-attended events is the annual International Observe the Moon Night which attracted 450 visitors to LPI in 2015.



A Sky Fest visitor observes a meteorite thin section.

Lessons Learned. Paper surveys are given to guests when they arrive for a Sky Fest event and are asked to return the completed surveys before they leave. This data reveals that Sky Fest attendees live in the Houston area with the vast majority living in the communities surrounding LPI. Though some attendees are repeat visitors, many are first-time attendees. Visitors attend primarily in mixed-age groups; mostly families. The majority of visitors attend Sky Fest events in two primary roles: as Facilitators and as Explorers. This means that visitors report that their primary motivations for attending are to facilitate a learning experi-

ence for their friends and family members, and to satisfy their own curiosity and interests.

While CESS and Sky Fest are held at LPI's facility, education staff has begun taking elements of these programs out into the community, meeting the public where they are.

Public Libraries: Elements of the Sky Fest program are being conducted in public libraries near LPI. Instead of a typical Sky Fest event as described above, these programs take place as part of existing hour-long programs in the library. During this hour, young people, typically 6-12 years old, move through three stations where they participate in hands-on activities. Like Sky Fest, these programs are thematic, centered on one over-arching topic such as the Moon or Mars.



Children at a public library make connections between rock types and light and dark areas of the Moon.

Community Parks: More recently, LPI has initiated conversations with parks in the Houston area to bring public engagement programming into community parks. A scale model solar system is in the plans for a new park being developed near LPI. In addition to providing content for the scale model, LPI educators and scientists plan to conduct programming with the scale model.

Discussions are also planned with a park in downtown Houston projected to open during September 2016. Facilities at this park will enable LPI to bring both the Sky Fest and CESS programs into the heart of Houston.

Additional Information: If you have questions or would like additional information regarding public engagement programs at LPI, please contact Andy Shaner at 281-486-2163 or shaner@lpi.usra.edu.