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EDUCATORS SELECTED TO FLY ON NASA'S SOFIA AIRBORNE OBSERVATORY

MOFFETT FIELD, Calif. -- Twenty-six educators from the United States have been selected for research flights aboard SOFIA, NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy. As participants in the Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors program, the educators will partner with professional astronomers using SOFIA for scientific observations in 2012 and 2013.

SOFIA is a modified Boeing 747SP jetliner equipped with a 100-inch (2.5-meter) diameter telescope. The observatory enables the analysis of infrared light to study the formation of stars and planets; chemistry of interstellar gases; composition of comets, asteroids and planets; and supermassive black holes at the center of galaxies.

"The unique design of SOFIA gives educators hands-on experience with world-class astronomical research," said John Gagosian, SOFIA program executive at NASA Headquarters in Washington. "Working with astronomers, educators participate in a research project from beginning to end and integrate that unique perspective with classroom lessons and public outreach programs."

SOFIA's Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors program is a yearly professional development opportunity extended to educators through a competitive, peer-reviewed process. This year's educators are:

- Melvin Gorman and Gordon Serkis, Chinle Junior High School in Chinle, Ariz.
- Ira Harden and Vincente Washington, City Honors College Preparatory Charter School in Inglewood, Calif.
- Clifford Gerstman and Susan Groff, Middle College High School in Santa Ana, Calif.

- Mike Cimino, Heritage Middle School, and John Clark, Deltona High School in Deltona, Fla.
- Randi Brennon, Hawaii Academy of Arts and Sciences in Pahoa, Hawaii
- Jo Dodds, Twin Falls Senior High School in Twin Falls, Idaho
- Ralph Peterson, North Gem High School in Bancroft, Idaho
- Jennifer Carter and Claudett M. Edie, Rowan County Senior High School in Morehead, Ky.
- Chelen Johnson, Breck School in Golden Valley, Minn.
- Matt Oates, Dilworth STEM Academy in Sparks, Nev.
- Dan Ruby, Fleischmann Planetarium and Science Center in Reno, Nev.
- Ryan Munkwitz and John Walsh, Southampton Intermediate and High School in Southampton, N.Y.
- James Johnson, Children's Center for Treatment & Education in Custer City, Pa.
- Adriana Alvarez and Mariela Aguirre, Alicia R. Chacon International School in El Paso, Texas
- David V. Black, Walden School of Liberal Arts in Provo, Utah
- Carolyn Bushman, Wendover Jr./Sr. High School in Wendover, Utah
- Sarah Scoles, National Radio Astronomy Observatory, and Anne Smith, Green Bank Middle School in Green Bank, W.Va.
- Constance Gartner, Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delavan, Wis.

"These educators submitted applications describing how they plan to take what they learn from SOFIA back to their classrooms and communities to help promote increased literacy in science, technology, engineering and math," said astronomer Dana Backman, manager of SOFIA's education and public outreach programs. "Selection for this unique opportunity is truly an honor for the educators, as well as for their local schools and science centers."

SOFIA is a joint program between NASA and the German Aerospace Center (DLR). The SOFIA program is managed at the Dryden Aircraft Operations Facility in Palmdale, Calif., where the aircraft is based. NASA's Ames Research Center at Moffett Field, Calif., manages SOFIA science and mission operations in concert with the Universities Space Research Association (USRA) in Columbia, Md., and the German SOFIA Institute (DSI) in Stuttgart, Germany. SOFIA's education and public outreach programs are managed by the SETI Institute in Mountain View, Calif., and the Astronomical Society of the Pacific in San Francisco.

For more information about SOFIA, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov/sofia>

For information about SOFIA's science mission, visit:

<http://www.sofia.usra.edu>

<http://www.dlr.de/en/sofia>

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