

Blueshift - January 31, 2010

A Meeting of the Minds

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Maggie: Hi, I'm Maggie Masetti and welcome to our January 31st episode of Blueshift, the Astrophysics Science Division podcast from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

The Blueshift team just got back from the Winter 2010 meeting of the American Astronomical Society. Professional meetings like these give those who work in astronomy and astrophysics a chance to get together and share their research and to talk about the various missions and projects they are involved in. Rather than just trying to list off all of the different things that go on at a AAS meeting, we thought maybe we'd try to show you. So the Blueshift team took our mic and recorder to the meeting so we could talk about what we were each doing and seeing. First up is Eric Winter.

Eric: Ok, one of the things I've been doing here at the AAS meeting is sitting at the Fermi gamma-ray space telescope mission table. Many NASA missions, and missions run by other organizations, maintain informational booths and tables at meetings like this. Not just to hand out stuff, but also to provide real useful information, like information on writing proposals to get observing time on the instrument and things like that. I also had a poster of my own displayed yesterday, but because I was in the booth most of the time, I didn't get to do much with it, and it probably wasn't very interesting anyway. Oh here, back to Maggie!

Maggie: I just got out of a meeting for the folks who contribute to education and public outreach (which we call EPO for short) for the James Webb Space Telescope. We normally have this meeting by telecon because we live and work in different parts of the country. This was a chance for us all to get together in person. Some of us were even meeting for the first time! In attendance today were a mix of people, including webmasters, public affairs people, EPO professionals, postdocs, and even some project scientists. And people came from all over, from California, Colorado, Connecticut, and even close-by Maryland. So next I'm heading off to the Webb telescope Town Hall Meeting where we're going to hear a project status update essentially. So that's it for me for now!

Tommy: Hey, this is Tommy. This week I've been here mainly to support the Suzaku and ASTRO-H booth, which we're using to give people information about the new mission. ASTRO-H is one of the MIDEX missions that was accepted for funding this year. So that's been really exciting. Because I've been working the booth, I haven't actually been to many talks or anything, but it has been a really great opportunity to see all my friends from grad school, who I haven't seen in the year since I left Wisconsin. So I would definitely say one of the nice things about AAS is the social side of things, getting to see all your old friends, catching up on both their work and personal news and just generally kind of having a good time talking to everybody.

Eric: OK, Maggie and I are starting a poster walk here on the second full day. The first poster we come to is "Non-LTE Modeling of Molecular Line Emission from Protoplanetary Disks - Evidence for Dust Settling". The next poster - much more colorful, very black and purple with lots of pretty graphs. In fact far too many graphs for the comprehension of the mortal mind - "Comparing Carbon Dust Grain Types from the Milky Way and the Large Magellanic Cloud", by the SAGE team.

Hmm. Maggie and I are walking down the aisle again. We're passing the Job Center, which is a useful booth that they set up for young, starving

astronomers looking for work. There's more posters, a lot of stuff having to do with Spitzer, and now here we are at the booth for WISE, the Wide-Field Infrared Survey Explorer, which actually just launched a few weeks ago. There's a poster for Galaxy Zoo, which is a really cool Internet project for involving non-scientists in classification of galaxy images found in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey.

Maggie: Eric and I ended up by the James Webb Space Telescope booth, and since we were there, we thought we'd ask them to tell us a little bit more about the mission and what it's going to do.

Massimo Stiavelli: James Webb Space Telescope is the successor to Hubble and Spitzer. It has overlapping wavelength with both, and is designed, optimized for infrared observations to study distant galaxies - the very first galaxies - and star formation in dust-enshrouded clouds. So it's going to be very exciting, and especially in light of what we've seen in the last Hubble servicing mission and the Wide Field Camera 3. This is whetting our appetite for what James Webb is going to be able to do.

Maggie: Eric and I made one last stop on our tour of the exhibit hall when we spotted some familiar faces.

Sara: I'm Sara Mitchell.

Sarah: And I'm Sarah Eyermann.

Sara: And we're here in the AAS exhibit hall because we have a multitude of posters we're representing today. How many posters do we have?

Sarah: We have 4, between us.

Sara: So they're all side-by-side, so we're just going back and forth between the posters. We've got one here about our after-school program, After-school Universe. And we've got one about Family Science Night, which is for families doing science together at night. And why don't you tell us about yours, Sarah?

Sarah: I have a poster about a Girl Scout program that I do called Big Explosions and Strong Gravity.

Sara: And finally we have this poster about, well, Blueshift! It's about you guys, and about what we'd like to do in Blueshift, and our Twitter feed, which is @NASAb blueshift.

Maggie: Even though this particular meeting is fairly large (at least for such a specialized field), it's pretty easy to run into people you know, either from work, or from past jobs and schools. And I agree with Tommy, in that it's really nice to see old friends. I got to see a few of my college friends, one of whom I hadn't seen in over 10 years!

AAS meetings do have a huge range of talks on all sorts of aspects of astronomy and astrophysics, and the exhibit halls are large and full of all sorts of cool things. Hopefully we gave you a little taste of what it's like to actually be at one of these meetings. We did post a few pictures of our experience on our Twitter account during the meeting, so those of you following us got a few live updates while we were there. If you want to follow us on Twitter, we are @NASAb blueshift. We also love getting comments on our website, which is universe.nasa.gov/blueshift. That's it for this episode. We'll see you in February with another one. This is Maggie, bringing the universe closer to you, with Blueshift.