

Dr. Kristine Larsen, Professor of Astronomy to Receive Women in Science Leadership Award

Petit Family Foundation & Connecticut Science Center to Bestow Honors at Sept. 27 Green Gala

Hartford, CT— September 23, 2014 —The Connecticut Science Center, New England’s premier informal-science-learning institution, is pleased to announce the recipient of its second annual **Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award: Dr. Kristine Larsen, Professor of Astronomy at Central Connecticut State University**. Part of the Science Center’s **Celebrating Women in Science** initiative, this award recognizes exceptional leadership in promoting women’s participation and interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

The Science Center’s Women in Science steering committee selected Dr. Larsen based on her extraordinary commitment to making science come alive for students and the general public and acting as an effective role model, mentor and advocate for girls and other populations historically underrepresented in science.

Dr. Kristine Larsen is a Connecticut native who received her BA from CCSU and MS and PhD from UCONN. Her perennially popular courses at CCSU in the First-Year Experience Program use popular culture as a hook to introduce scientific methodologies to non-science majors. Dr. Larsen has been deeply involved in public outreach since her undergraduate days and has brought her enthusiasm for science to hundreds of schools, Girl Scout troops, libraries and summer camps over the past three decades.

When asked about the importance of inspiring young women to pursue STEM careers, Dr. Larsen refers to a Chinese proverb that notes that women hold up half the dome of the sky. “Until women truly represent equal numbers with men in exploring the cosmos in observatory domes, engineering fusion reactor domes, searching for oil in salt domes, and making science policy in the Capitol dome, we must all, men and women alike, work tirelessly to mentor each and every young woman in this country to understand that a piece of the sky awaits her – if she just reaches her mind upward.”

Her scholarly work includes research on the history of women in astronomy and best practices in science education. Her astronomical work heavily involves undergraduate students, especially women, and her students have presented their own scholarly work at national conferences. Women are often in the majority in her upper-level astronomy courses, an uncommon ratio and a measure of the impact of her recruiting and mentoring of female students. In addition to young women in her own program, Dr. Larsen also mentors first semester freshmen studying to become elementary school teachers.

Dr. Larsen was one of seven finalists selected by the Science Center’s Women in Science steering committee. The steering committee is a group of community leaders who are transforming the possibilities for women in the sciences through their own work and advocacy.

"We were so impressed with all of our award finalists this year," said Beth Taylor, Director, Center for Health, Care and Well-being at the University of Hartford and Women in Science steering committee member. "Not only are these women making tremendous contributions to their fields, they are going out of their way to mentor the next generation of women in science. We congratulate Dr. Larsen on her success, and we applaud her extraordinary creativity and passion for making the sciences more accessible."

The award will be presented Saturday evening at the Connecticut Science Center's Green Gala. The award is part of the Science Center's Celebrating Women in Science initiative, an effort that began two years ago to raise the profile of women in the sciences and encourage girls and young women to pursue studies and careers in STEM.

"Dr. Larsen represents the best in Connecticut in the STEM fields. She is an excellent mentor and true teacher. Helping others learn sciences creates a stronger and more vibrant society for all of us," said Dr. William Petit. "She is truly kind and selflessly helps others — much as Jennifer, Hayley and Michaela did during their lives. The Petit Family Foundation is honored to be associated with Dr. Larsen and the Connecticut Science Center."

The Connecticut Science Center is dedicated to lifelong learning through interactive and innovative experiences that explore our changing world through science. The Green Gala is the Connecticut Science Center's signature annual event for science learning. This year's event will celebrate 5 Sense-ational Years marking the Science Center's fifth birthday with an event to delight the senses. Drawing more than 50 sponsors and 700 guests, event proceeds fund the Science Center's work to inspire creative thinking and bring science to life for children and adults. Since opening in 2009, more than 1.7 million people have been served by the organization's exciting and educational programming.

The Green Gala features delicious tapas dining on every floor, full bars and dancing. Patron Tickets are \$175 each and are available on the Science Center's website at CTScienceCenter.org/gala.

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About the Connecticut Science Center The LEED-Gold certified Connecticut Science Center, located in downtown Hartford, sparks creative imagination and an appreciation for science by immersing visitors in fun and educational hands-on, minds-on interactive experiences while maintaining an environmentally conscious presence. Serving more than 1,700,000 people since opening in 2009, the Science Center features 165 hands-on exhibits in 10 galleries and a range of topics, including space and earth sciences, physical sciences, biology, the Connecticut River watershed, alternative energy sources, Connecticut inventors and innovations, a children's gallery, and much more. Other features include four educational labs, a 200-seat 3D digital theater, function room, gift store and café, and ongoing events for all ages. The Science Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing science education throughout the state of Connecticut and New England, providing learning opportunities for students and adults of all ages, and engaging the community in scientific exploration. The Connecticut Science Center is also home to the **Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Academy for Teachers**, providing powerful professional development for educators. More information: www.CTScienceCenter.org or 860.SCIENCE.

About the Petit Family Foundation The Petit Family Foundation honors the memories of Jennifer Hawke-Petit, Hayley Elizabeth Petit, and Michaela Rose Petit by continuing the kindness, idealism, and activism that defined their lives. The Foundation's funds are given to foster the education of young people, especially women in the science; to

improve the lives of those affected by chronic illness; and to support efforts to protect and help those affected by violence. www.PetitFamilyFoundation.org

About Celebrating Women in Science Initiative The Connecticut Science Center's ***Celebrating Women in Science*** Initiative draws attention to the accomplishments of women in the sciences as well as inspire girls and young women to pursue interests in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields of study and career paths. The initiative is a joint effort with the **Petit Family Foundation**, which has joined with the Science Center as the Founding Sponsor of this initiative.