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DRAMATIC MID-AIR CAPTURE OF SPACE CAPSULE CONTAINING PARTICLES FROM THE SUN TO BE BROADCAST LIVE AT THE ADLER PLANETARIUM ON SEPTEMBER 8

Adler astronomers will be on hand to discuss Genesis mission expected to yield data on the origin of the Solar System

Chicago, IL – On the morning of September 8, 2004, two helicopters equipped with specially designed hooks and crewed by Hollywood stunt pilots will attempt to snag the Genesis Sample Recovery Capsule containing samples from the Sun in mid-air over Utah. This dramatic recovery marks the end of a 27-month NASA mission to collect particles from the Sun, and the beginning of years of study on the origin of our Sun and planetary system. The event will be broadcast live at the Adler Planetarium and Adler astronomers will be on hand to answer questions about the capture and the NASA Genesis project.

NASA's spacecraft Genesis was launched in August 2001 to capture a sample of the invisible particles making up solar wind. Solar wind is highly affected by the earth's magnetic field, so Genesis was deployed into deep space, far beyond the moon's orbit. The exact location of Genesis' collection was the L2 point – a special place between the Earth and the Sun where the gravities of the two bodies cancel each other out.

For 27 months, Genesis held fragile wafers of pure diamond, sapphire, gold and other materials to the solar wind, slowly intercepting a sample of the Sun weighing no more than several sand grains. The successful return of the sample on September 8 will be NASA's first return of space material since the moon rocks collected by the 1972 Apollo mission, and the first to contain material collected further away than the Moon.

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"Until now astronomers have never had physical star material to examine. Now, we will have an actual sample to test in the lab," says Mark SubbaRao, Adler Astronomer. "The outer layer of the Sun – from which the solar wind is driven – is likely to be similar in composition to the gas cloud that formed our Solar System."

The mid-air capture was designed to protect the extremely fragile gemstone and precious metal collection wafers from being damaged in an impact with the Earth's surface. The recovery is planned in several stages. The sample-containing capsule will be released from the Genesis spacecraft in the early morning hours of September 8 and will hurtle through space until its first parachute deploys about 19 miles above Utah. A second, larger parachute will deploy from the capsule when it reaches 11.5 miles above the ground, slowing its descent to approximately 10 miles per hour. At this point, the lead helicopter will attempt to snag the capsule using a specially designed hook. A second helicopter will also be in position in case the first capture attempt fails – pilots project that a total of five recovery opportunities will be available to the two helicopters.

At the Adler, live NASA TV broadcasts of the capture round out an eventful summer in the CyberSpace gallery, where the theme of "Solar System Summer" has prevailed with coverage of the Mars rovers, Cassini mission to Saturn, Messenger launch to Mercury, and the transit of Venus. Coverage of the Genesis capture will be shown live from 10:30 am to 1:00 pm on September 8, with the capture expected to take place around 11:15 am Central Time.

To learn more about NASA's current exploration of Mars and Saturn, see *Mars Rocks!* and *Secrets of Saturn*, now showing in the Adler Planetarium's historic Sky Theater.

***The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum**, America's first planetarium, has inspired more than 35 million visitors since its opening in 1930. Nine state-of-the-art exhibition galleries located in the stunning Sky Pavilion present modern space exploration and the history of astronomy. The world's first StarRider Theater, the most technologically advanced, audience-interactive planetarium, features virtual flights through the cosmos. The Adler's mission to present the human quest to better understand the Universe is led by our scientists and historians, working at the forefront of research in astronomy and its fascinating history. The Adler Planetarium is located at 1300 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago. The Adler is open every day except for Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. For more information, call the Adler Planetarium at 312.922-STAR, or check out our website at www.adlerplanetarium.org.*

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