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AMERICA'S FIRST PLANETARIUM

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LT. GOVERNOR PAT QUINN AND NASA ASTRONAUT SCOTT ALTMAN JOIN TWO ILLINOIS MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN SPACE – CYBERSPACE!

Middle school kids talk live with Lt. Governor Quinn and Capt. Altman in a distance learning video conference in the Adler Planetarium's *CyberSpace Gallery*

CHICAGO – **Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn** saluted America's First Planetarium today as part of its 75th Anniversary celebration. He was joined by **NASA astronaut Capt. Scott Altman** in a demonstration of the Adler Planetarium's *Astronomy Connections* program, a distance learning initiative providing schools across Illinois with access to Adler educators, scientists and other resources.

In today's demonstration, sixth-grade math students at Lakeview Junior High School in Downers Grove, IL, and eighth-grade science students from Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Decatur, IL, made presentations of projects they worked on this year. Students also had the chance to ask Capt. Altman about his experiences aboard Space Shuttles Columbia and Atlantis, which include 38 logged days in space. Altman is a native Illinoisan who was born in Lincoln, IL.

As the Adler begins a year-long celebration of its 75th Anniversary, the museum has adopted a new strategic plan to become the country's premier center for space science education. "The Adler is expanding its focus to incorporate stories of human space exploration," said Adler President Paul H. Knappenberger Jr., PhD. "Today's distance learning session featuring Capt. Altman is the kind of programming the Adler looks forward to providing Illinois schools in the future."

Lt. Governor Quinn also presented Dr. Knappenberger with a declaration from the State of Illinois commemorating the museum's founding in 1930.

"Just as the Adler has helped people overcome and understand the vast distance of space, it continues to help students eliminate distance barriers to learning opportunities and enrichment," Quinn said. "Through distance learning programs such as these, students from rural and suburban areas can tap the resources of cutting-edge institutions."

About *Astronomy Connections*

Astronomy Connections is the Adler Planetarium's professional development program created to increase teachers' and students' science literacy. Through technology-enabled distance learning,
(more)

Astronomy Connections/Lt. Quinn/Astronaut Altman – Page Two

Astronomy Connections extends the museum's resources – staff experts, technology, access to exhibits and curriculum – into classrooms. Adler education staff and astronomers develop program curricula aligned with current Chicago Public School and Illinois State Education requirements and standards.

Schools are encouraged to enroll two teachers in the program, one science teacher and a non-science teacher. The Adler has found this approach facilitates the integration of science with other curricula.

During professional development workshops, teachers receive ongoing technology training, resource kits and lessons plans. They also gain knowledge of new science concepts, technology skills and teaching methods.

All teachers taking part in *Astronomy Connections* participate in several distance-learning sessions to enhance the curriculum they have learned. For two years, the Adler's education staff has tested a variety of interactive distance learning techniques to determine which methods effectively support teachers' efforts to instruct their students. The Adler loans technology to teachers for the year and trains them how to link to the Adler for distance learning sessions. Additionally, the museum has set up a dedicated website where students post homework assignments; the site also is used by teachers to develop lesson plans and review student work.

The Adler maintains a broadcast studio and booth in its fully electronic *CyberSpace* Gallery. The museum has a multipoint control unit to support simultaneous videoconferencing programs with multiple schools, community groups, and libraries. The Adler can broadcast from anywhere in the museum, making the entire Adler facility a venue for distance learning programs.

Dr. Susan L. Wagner, Adler director of education, was an *Astronomy Connections* participant before joining the museum in 2004. "*Astronomy Connections* offered access to resources my school could not provide," said Dr. Wagner who would like to increase the program's participation by 25 percent by the end of 2006. "The Adler has tested distance learning techniques for several years and the museum is ready to expand the program. The Illinois Wi-Fi Initiative will put the technology infrastructure in place to help the Adler reach more teachers and students."

Classes taught by Karin Snodgrass of Lakeview Junior High School and Monica Hayes of Thomas Jefferson Middle School participated in a special demonstration of *Astronomy Connections*' teleconferencing capabilities. Students gave presentations on the work they had completed as part of *Astronomy Connections*. In addition, they had a question-and-answer session with Capt. Scott Altman, a NASA astronaut and veteran of four Space Shuttle missions.

Both teachers agree *Astronomy Connections* has given their students access to experts to guide their class work. "*Astronomy Connections* has provided expanded opportunities...in which students are able to interact with scientists on a real time basis. That technology allows students to have questions answered by experts in the fields related to the projects in which they are involved," says Snodgrass.

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Astronomy Connections/Lt. Quinn/Astronaut Altman – Page Three

“We were given access to experts to help guide us with our research. Astronomy Connections helped my students and me advance our technology skills through computer design programs, on-line research and interactive communications,” says Hayes.

Support from Astronomy Connections is provided by Com Ed, Deloitte & Touche, the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, Harris Bank Foundation, HSBC, the Donald P. and Byrd M. Kelly Foundation, the Estate of Paul H. Leffman, Motorola Foundation, NASA, Oppenheimer Family Foundation, Peoples Energy, Polk Bros. Foundation, The Regenstein Education Fund, The Alan B. Shepard Society, the Siragusa Foundation, the State of Illinois, and the Women’s Board of the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum.

During Quinn’s term as Lieutenant Governor, Illinois has joined the Aerospace States Association, a nationwide group created to promote grassroots perspectives on federal aerospace programs, boost local high-tech industries and highlight the educational, employment and medical benefits of a vibrant space program.

America’s First Planetarium

The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum – America’s First Planetarium – was founded in 1930 by Chicago business leader Max Adler. Celebrating its 75th Anniversary in 2005, the Adler promotes cutting-edge research in astronomy and its fascinating history. The museum is home to one of the world’s most important antique instrument collections and is the only museum in the world with two full-size planetarium theaters, including the world’s first StarRider Theater. The Adler is also a recognized leader in science education, with a focus on inspiring young people, particularly women and minorities, to pursue careers in science.

On May 12, 2005, the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum marked its 75th Anniversary by launching a year of celebration and a new direction for the future. A new mission will expand the museum’s current focus on astronomy to celebrate human space exploration and America’s space heroes. Through this new vision, the Adler will help inspire the next generation of explorers.

The Adler Planetarium is located at 1300 South Lake Shore Drive in Chicago and is open every day except for Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. For more information, call 312.922.STAR, or visit our website at www.adlerplanetarium.org

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