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AMERICA'S FIRST PLANETARIUM

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MEDIA ADVISORY

AMERICA'S FIRST WOMEN ASTRONAUT CANDIDATES HONORED AS AMERICA'S FIRST AND ONLY WOMAN SHUTTLE COMMANDER PREPARES TO LEAD NASA'S HISTORIC RETURN TO FLIGHT

Four of the original Mercury 13 – America's first women astronaut candidates – will be honored Wednesday at the Adler Planetarium one month before NASA's historic **Return to Flight**. The four women, confirmed to attend the **2005 Women in Space Science Award Celebration presented by the Adler's Women's Board**, will gather to be honored and nationally recognized for the first time.

NASA's Return to Flight, the first shuttle mission since the shuttle Columbia accident in 2003, is slated to be launched between July 13 – July 31. The historic Return to Flight mission is led by Shuttle Commander Eileen Collins, the first woman Space Shuttle pilot, and the first and only woman in history to command a shuttle mission.

The celebration will include remarks from **Capt. James A. Lovell, Jr.**, veteran of four Apollo and Gemini missions including the perilous Apollo 13 mission, and a video message from Astronaut **Pam Melroy**, the third woman ever to pilot a NASA space shuttle.

EVENT: Women in Space Science Award – Presented by the Adler Planetarium Women's Board

DATE: Wednesday, June 15

WHO: Mercury 13 – Myrtle "K" Cagle, Gene Nora Jessen, Irene Leverton, & Rhea Woltman
Martha Ackmann, PhD, author of *The Mercury 13: The Untold Story of Thirteen Women and the Dream of Space Flight*
Capt. James A. Lovell, Jr. – Adler Planetarium's 75th Anniversary Honorary Chairman

TIME: 5:00 pm – Cocktail reception and book signing with Mercury 13 and Ackmann
6:00 pm – 2005 Women in Space Science Award Ceremony and Keynote Address by Ackmann

PLACE: Adler Planetarium - 1300 South Lake Shore Drive

PHOTO OPS:

4:15 pm – Mercury 13

5:00 pm – Mercury 13, Capt. Lovell and Adler Planetarium Women's Board

5:50 pm – Chicago-area schoolchildren with a keen interest/achievement in science attending keynote

6:00 pm – Award Ceremony/Keynote Address - Mercury 13, Capt. Lovell and Martha Ackmann

****NOTE TO MEDIA: Press must RSVP. For interview requests, please contact Molly or Amy.****

MERCURY 13: AMERICA'S FIRST FEMALE ASTRONAUT CANDIDATES:

On May 5, 1961, Alan Shepard became the first American in Space. As the world celebrated his successful flight aboard Freedom 7 a group of thirteen women underwent secret testing with hopes of becoming America's first female astronauts. They passed the same tests as the Mercury 7, but were dismissed by NASA and Congress. Twenty years later, Sally Ride became the first American woman in space.

On June 15, 2005, the Women's Board of the Adler Planetarium will honor the Mercury 13 with the **2005 Women in Space Science Award**. Martha Ackmann, PhD, author of *The Mercury 13: The Untold Story of Thirteen Women and the Dream of Space Flight*, will give the evening's keynote address.

Each year the Adler's Women's Board presents the Women in Space Science Award to a leading female in the science or technology community who has made a lasting impact on space exploration.