

NJMC NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**New Jersey
Meadowlands
Commission**

Astronomy Educators Shine at Meadowlands Environment Center

LYNDHURST, N.J. – Meadowlands Environment Center educator J.J. Rusher was named a NASA Solar System/Jet Propulsion Laboratory Ambassador this week, joining fellow MEC educator Laura Venner as volunteer representatives of the space program. As ambassadors, Venner and Rusher learn about NASA’s space exploration missions and recent discoveries from mission scientists and specialists and pass on their knowledge to schoolchildren who participate in the MEC’s education programs.

Venner, a veteran NASA Ambassador, is also one of two certified NASA Solar System/JPL Educators in the state and teaches other educators how to incorporate NASA materials and research into their classes. Venner is also an Earth and Space Explainer at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and is writing a book on teaching astronomy to individuals with disabilities.

“We are tremendously proud of J.J., Laura and the entire staff of highly-trained and motivated educators at the Environment Center,” said Robert Ceberio, Executive Director of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, which runs the MEC. “Our educators bring a great level of dedication and enthusiasm to their jobs and are making a positive impact in the lives of thousands of children.”

The NJMC’s Meadowlands Environment Center is operated by educators from Ramapo College. More than 13,000 children from 70 school districts in grades K-12 took part in the MEC’s science education programs during the 2007-08 academic year. The programs cover a variety of scientific disciplines, including astronomy, ecology, chemistry, biology, physics, natural history and geology.

The MEC’s astronomy program is greatly enhanced by the existence of the William D. McDowell Observatory, which the NJMC opened in 2008 as part of a new sustainable classroom facility. It features a research-grade telescope with a 20-inch lens and special light-pollution filters to enhance the view of the galaxy. The observatory’s director, Dr. John Sloan, has 30 years experience in astronomy and physics.

Located in DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst, the observatory is open to the public for free on Monday and Wednesday nights from 7 to 10 p.m. during the winter season. The MEC also offers Astronomy Learning Sessions on Tuesday nights from 7 to 9 p.m. The subject of these three-night sessions changes each month and participants are required to register for the full program in advance.

For more information about the MEC and the observatory, and to register for public programs, visit www.njmeadowlands.gov/ec or call 201-460-8300.

To arrange an interview with J.J. Rusher and Laura Venner, contact Brian Aberback at 201-460-4619 or brian.aberback@njmeadowlands.gov.

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