



PRESS RELEASE

TRINITY COLLEGE 'SPACED OUT' BY NEW MARS RESEARCH LABORATORY

An initiative between Trinity College in East Perth and Mars Society Australia, a private non-profit organization with the goal of sending humans to live and work on Mars, will see an innovative new Centre for Planetary and Space Studies set up at the East Perth school this year, bringing Mars research to the heart of the Western Australian capital.

Mars Society Australia's Vice-President and Outreach Director, Mr David Cooper, believes that this Centre may well be the first space research laboratory to be established in a secondary education institution in Australia, and speaks enthusiastically about the goals of the new Centre.

"Discussions began after the Australian Mars Exploration Conference was held at the school in August last year, when both parties saw an opportunity to band together to provide a home for Mars-related research in Australia.

"The Centre for Planetary and Space Studies will allow researchers the opportunity to work on projects and provide outreach and educational activities at the same time. Mars Society Australia is involved in; space research projects, and educating the public on the importance of a human mission to Mars, so this initiative was something we have strongly supported from the beginning."

Head of Science Learning Area at Trinity College, Mr Ray Priskich, says that this alliance will benefit both Trinity students and adult space enthusiasts and students alike, with the development of a summer school style series of lectures during 2004 as the first plank in a space educational program run by the Centre.

"This will complement some of the space-related resources and curriculum we already provide at Trinity College, including our state-of-the-art robotic Observatory."

Part of the agreement involves the construction of a facility by Trinity College to house Mars Society Australia's Starchaser Marsupial Rover vehicle, which has been under construction in Perth for the past 18 months. Dr Graham Mann, Project Manager for the Rover, considers the vehicle to be the world's first ground-up design for a prototype for a Rover vehicle that would be capable of carrying and supporting Mars explorers across the surface of Mars for days at a time.

"Humans will be sent to Mars to explore, and one of the ways in which they will do this will be to use rugged, all terrain vehicles," says Graham Mann. "The requirements of Martian rovers will differ from those used in the lunar landings in a number of ways. They will need to be capable of undertaking long overland journeys, contain pressurised living quarters and be robust enough to operate for periods of years.

"Once the Rover is completed, we hope to trial it in the Australian Outback, in a location reminiscent of some of those found on Mars."

"The Australian Red Centre shares some similarities with the Martian landscape, such as dust and geological formations. So we can put our Rover through its paces in the Outback and see how it performs in this type of environment. This kind of research will be important to find out the optimum design and performance of a Rover as an integral part of a real human Mars mission.

“The United States has announced plans to send human beings to Mars, and I would love to see Australian research playing a part in this grand vision.”

Dave Cooper agrees. “We thank Trinity College for having the foresight and imagination to get this plan off the ground, as it capitalises on the interest in space exploration generated through the recent announcements of a return to the Moon and future missions to Mars.”

“Those with a passion for space travel and exploration, both young and old, will have a wonderful program ahead of them, with the lecture series just the first step in a comprehensive educational program. They will also get to see the Starchaser Marsupial Rover take shape as work continues on the vehicle from the Trinity College workshop.

“Linking science and technology with space is a great way to encourage young people to pursue careers in these fields and there may be opportunities for Australia to work with the United States space program in the future,” says Dave Cooper.

“We hope this new Centre will inspire a new generation of scientists and engineers to develop new technology which can be used for space-related purposes but also to enrich our lives here on Earth.”

For interviews, please direct inquiries to David Cooper at outreach@marssociety.org.au or Ray Priskich at priskich.ray@cathednet.wa.edu.au or Graham Mann at g.mann@murdoch.wa.edu.au.

The Mars Society was founded to further the goal of the exploration and settlement of the Red Planet.

For further information on MSA, see <http://www.marssociety.org.au>

For further information on the Starchaser Marsupial Rover project, see <http://www.marsupial.org.au/>

For information about Trinity College, please see <http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/>