The American Association of Variable Star Observers

We present the ninth **AAVSO William Tyler Olcott Distinguished Service Award** to

Karen J. Meech

> "for her promotion of variable star observing through her distinguished work as astronomer and educator, her service to the AAVSO as Council member and colleague, and her being both friend and inspirational role model to teachers and students of astronomy."

Karen Meech is an accomplished planetary scientist who is also very involved in astronomy education and outreach, and who has been involved with variable stars and the AAVSO since her undergraduate years at Rice University. In those years, during the summer of 1978 she completed a research assistantship at Maria Mitchell Observatory, resulting in three papers published in the *International Bulletin on Variable Stars*. The following year, she spent the summer as an assistant at AAVSO headquarters. During her graduate studies at MIT, Karen again was a research assistant at AAVSO headquarters, and also published variable star-related material in the *Journal of the AAVSO* and *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific*.

One of Karen's major contributions to the promotion of astronomy in general and variable star astronomy in particular came with her creation of the NSF-funded Towards Other Planetary Systems (TOPS) annual summer astronomy education program for Hawaii and Pacific area high school teachers. For ten years, TOPS exposed high school teachers to basic astronomy content and curriculum during an intensive three-week residential program, teaching methods to integrate state and national science/astronomy standards into their classrooms, and learning evaluation and assessment techniques. Variable star observing and AAVSO's *Hands-On Astrophysics* curriculum were an integral part of the program.

Many teachers passed through the TOPS program, and went on to use AAVSO materials and information in their classrooms, including Kamehameha Schools teacher Tom Chun, who developed a full astronomy course, including a semester-long variable star photometry lab. Thousands of high school students are being exposed to variable star astronomy by TOPS-trained teachers, and some of these students have gone on to carry out their own variable star observing programs. Numerous award-winning science fair projects have been produced by students taught by teachers influenced by Karen.

Karen's commitment to education and outreach is deep. She is frequently asked, and is always willing, to give public astronomy talks to groups ranging from local Girl Scout troops to high school science clubs to career-day gatherings, and to such diverse audiences as Kiwanis clubs, education conferences, and the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies.

Karen is currently leader of the Astrobiology Institute at the University of Hawaii, a team operating under the NASA Astrobiology Institute. Education and outreach are emphasized in the program, including annual summer programs for teachers and students. In her planetary science work she is a Co-Investigator on 3 NASA cometary missions: Deep Impact, Epoxi, and StardustNExT, and she works to bring the excitement of deciphering the mysteries of comets to the public.

Karen has received widespread recognition for her work: she is the recipient of the American Astronomical Society's (AAS) Annie Jump Cannon Award in Astronomy and the AAS Planetary Division's Harold C. Urey Prize, and she has been elected or appointed to a number of prominent posts in astronomical organizations, among them the Presidency of IAU Division III Planetary Systems Sciences, the Presidency of IAU Commission 51 (Bioastronomy: Search for Extraterrestrial Life), the HST Telescope Allocation Committee, the Astronomical Society of the Pacific Board of Directors, and the AAVSO Council.

In recognition of her contributions to variable star observing, astronomy education, and public outreach, it is with great pleasure that the AAVSO awards the William Tyler Olcott Award to Karen J. Meech.

Paula Szkody President	Arne A. Henden Director

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