

Status Report

ASE NEO Committee work

23 March 2007

There have been many key events in the work of the Committee in the past several months.

In January 2007 we held a very successful fund-raising event in cooperation with the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland, CA. The Committee called on the ASE membership and was delighted that eleven of our members, including 3 key “headliners” (Leonov, Carpenter, and Schirra) attended to help draw in the public. The events of the day began with the Luncheon Society’s special luncheon for all of us, hosted by our friend and supporter from the Bay Area, Bob McBarton. That was immediately followed up by a moderately successful autographing session at the Chabot and then a series of VIP and general public receptions. The evening was topped off in the Chabot’s planetarium where the American Museum of Natural History had loaned the Chabot its new Cosmic Collisions show especially for us. In addition to introducing the astronauts and cosmonauts present we gave a special award honoring Carolyn Shoemaker, the widow and partner of Gene Shoemaker, two of the team who, along with David Levy discovered the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet. (you may remember it crashed into Jupiter in 1994) Gene and Carolyn really started the whole modern era in NEO discovery and tracking.

All in all the Chabot fund-raiser netted over \$110K to help support our upcoming international Workshop Series on NEO Deflection.

In February I ended up in a flurry of NEO events which each generated considerable press coverage about our initiative with the UN. The first was the AAAS Annual Meeting held in San Francisco and very well covered by the science press. Both Ed Lu and I appeared in a very well attended press conference and did many follow-up interviews as well. While there was some misreporting of our activities (one major wire service got it wrong and reported that we wanted the UN to essentially create a space program to deflect NEOs!) on the whole it was well reported and made pretty clear that the issue of dealing with NEOs in the future will be an internationally coordinated process, and that ASE is taking the initiative to get the coordination started.

Immediately following the AAAS event I headed for the 2007 session of the UN/COPUOS's Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in Vienna, Austria. Dorin Prunariu and I, with local support from Franz Viehbock, attended the NEO sessions and I presented a technical paper (elsewhere on this website) and powerpoint presentation filling in the delegates on recent work in the NEO world. The primary purpose of our current UN work is to "pave the way" for the delivery of our "draft Protocol" (the product of our upcoming international workshops) to UN/COPUOS in the spring of 2009. We are formal members of Action Team 14 (NEO) and it is working closely with us to prepare the way.

Finally I also presented a paper and powerpoint on our work at the just concluded AIAA Planetary Defense Conference 2007, held in Washington, DC. This was an excellent event bringing together the NEO professional community from many nations. The discussions were generally excellent and quite animated. The final day was dedicated to a session on Political and Policy Issues and our work was well represented and generated considerable interest.

During PDC07 NASA released (and presented) its anticipated Report to Congress on NEOs. This report was to address three issues; an analysis of options to meet the new 140 meter Spaceguard Survey goal (finding 90% of all NEOs 140 meter in diameter and above by 2020), a recommended program and budget to accomplish that goal, and an analysis of alternatives to deflect a NEO should one be found threatening an impact. NASA did a good job on the first part (although some of the costs are controversial), completely stiffed the Congress on the second part by recommending only to continue the current program, and put out a very controversial and ill supported analysis of mitigation options in the final section. For those interested this third element is fully addressed in #15 on the B612 Foundation's website, <http://www.b612foundation.org/press/press.html>.

We are moving rapidly now to convening the first in our series of 4 international workshops on NEO deflection. This will be held 9-12 May in Strasbourg, France hosted by ISU (Intl Space Univ). The second of the workshops will be held in Sibiu, Romania immediately prior to our Congress in Scotland where we will make a full report on all of our activities.