

UNIVERSITIES SPACE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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Ode to Pluto

Impromptu Memorial Appears at Scale Model of Solar System on National Mall

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Washington, DC— An impromptu memorial to Pluto's *planet* status has appeared at a scale model of the Solar System on the National Mall in Washington, DC. At Pluto's place in the *Voyage* exhibition – a one to 10-billion scale model of the Solar System designed to convey the distances between the Sun and its planets and the relative sizes of these bodies – visitors have left condolence cards, affectionate notes, and flowers to mark the passing of Pluto from “planet” to “dwarf planet” status. Pluto has held the designation of “planet” since 1930 but on August 24th the International Astronomical Union announced that it had agreed to adopt a new definition of ‘planet’ – and that Pluto did not make the cut.

One note left at the Pluto stanchion of the *Voyage* exhibition reads “We’ll Miss You” in bold letters and is ‘signed by the other eight planets (Jupiter seems to be the John Hancock of the planets). Another note that seems to be in a child’s handwriting reads, “Pluto will always be a planet in my heart” and is signed “XOXO.”

About the Voyage Exhibition

Interspersed along 600 meters of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the *Voyage* exhibition is a one to 10-billion scale model of the Solar System that conveys a true sense of the distances between, and relative sizes of, our Sun and its planets in a very tangible, identifiable way. The exhibition stretches from the National Air and Space Museum to the Smithsonian Castle.

The vision is an exhibition that can engage an entire community – students, families, teachers, and the public – in a powerful story about Earth’s place in space. Complementing the exhibit itself and maximizing its impact are tours and tour brochures, activity guides promoting use of the exhibition as a Solar System laboratory, grade K-13 lessons on Solar System science, workshops for educators, programs for thousands of students in classrooms that are delivered by planetary scientists and engineers, and programs for families and the public.

The National Center for Earth and Space Science Education (NCESSE) is now making replicas of the *Voyage* exhibition available for permanent installation in communities across the nation, together with the full suite of programs and resources. *Voyage* can be installed on a university campus, in a community park, or along a downtown street.

The *Voyage* exhibition is comprised of thirteen stanchions, ten of which are 8.5-foot tall, containing the

model worlds and full color storyboards. The Sun is represented as a striking gold sphere. Planets and moons are depicted to scale as 3-dimensional crystalline spheres laser-sculpted inside solid glass. The imagery and text provide a compelling up-close view of the planets and moons, in stark contrast to the 3-D models that speak to the powerful reality of tiny worlds in a vast space.

Meticulously designed and placed, *Voyage* is a seamless fusion of sculpture and science education—an achievement both aesthetic and instructional deemed worthy of placement on the National Mall under the strict standards of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The *Voyage* began in October 2001 with installation of the exhibition on the National Mall through a partnership between Challenger Center for Space Science Education, the Smithsonian Institution, and NASA. Now managed by NCESSSE, the exhibit has the power to engage communities across the nation in the wonders of space, the spirit of discovery, and the quest to understand.

NCESSSE is part of the Universities Space Research Association (USRA), a national consortium of 100 universities established 37 years ago by the National Academy of Sciences. USRA operates programs and facilities in space-related science, technology, and related education. Last year, researchers from more than 400 universities and other organizations participated in USRA activities. More information about USRA can be found at www.usra.edu.