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OCE receives prestigious Alouette Award for second consecutive year

TORONTO – The Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute (CASI) awarded its 2008 Alouette Award to a team that includes the Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE) for an ingenious way of star gazing that could unlock some of the universe's biggest mysteries.

OCE is part of the Microvariability and Oscillations of Stars (MOST) astronomy mission. The MOST project is a scientific partnership that uses the world's smallest space telescope mounted on Canada's first microsatellite, orbiting 800 kilometres above the Earth.

The tiny satellite weighs just 60 kilograms and carries a high-precision telescope no wider than a pie plate. Though small in size, it's big in capability, as it will be used to conduct ultra-precise measurements of the varying brightness of stars. Such measurements allow scientists to probe the atmospheres of planets beyond our solar system which can determine the age of stars and possibly reveal how these planets formed and evolved.

The MOST team received this year's award, which recognizes an outstanding contribution to the advancement in Canadian space technology, applications, science or engineering at the ASTRO 2008 Conference last night in Montreal.

OCE support led to the creation of University of Toronto's Space Flight Laboratory, where along with University of British Columbia (UBC), the data from this project is being sent and studied. In addition, OCE's Centre for Earth and Environmental Technologies is also working with mechanical and electronics engineers involved in the project.

"We're delighted to support a team recognized by CASI for the second consecutive year," said Mark Romoff, OCE President and CEO. "Accurately determining the age of the oldest stars in the galaxy is within the MOST team's reach, and that could lead to helping answer and expand upon fundamental questions about the nature of the universe that have intrigued scientists and non-scientists alike since the beginning of time."

In 2007, OCE was recognized with the same award for the "Tomatosphere" project that now engages over one million students from Grades 3 to 10 from Canada, the United States and other countries. First launched in 2000 by chief scientist Dr. Michael Dixon and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) astronaut, Dr. Robert Thirsk, the project began with tomato seeds being exposed to two simulated Martian environments. Students were given these "seeds from space" along with terrestrial seeds and carried out several experiments to see if the two different environments caused different behaviour. And in 2006, students also compared terrestrial seeds to those that spent 19 months aboard the International Space Station. OCE's continued involvement in this and other programs is part of its mandate to instill passion for scientific studies in Ontario students.

About Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE) Inc. (www.oce-ontario.org)

Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE) Inc. drives the commercialization of cutting-edge research across key market sectors to build the economy of tomorrow and secure Ontario's global competitiveness. OCE also fosters the training and development of the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs and business leaders, and is a key partner with Ontario's industry, universities, colleges, research hospitals, investors and governments. OCE's five Centres work in communications and information technology, earth and environmental technologies, energy, materials and manufacturing and photonics.

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