



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tomatosphere: “Seeds from Space” science program for schools wins Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute 2007 Alouette Award

TORONTO, April 26, 2007 – The Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE)-sponsored Tomatosphere Project, embraced by over 9,200 Canadian classrooms, has yielded a bumper crop of successes. Engaging over 500,000 students from grades 3 to 10, with unanimously enthusiastic evaluations from teachers, Tomatosphere is the 2007 Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute (CASI) Alouette Award winner. The CASI Alouette Award recognizes an outstanding contribution to advancement in Canadian space technology, application, science or engineering.

Tomatosphere launched in 2000 under the direction of chief scientist Dr. Michael Dixon and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk. The project began with tomato seeds exposed to two simulated Martian environments. Students in Canadian classrooms were given the “seeds from space,” along with terrestrial seeds and guided through their conducting of blind-controlled growth experiments to determine if the seeds – and plants resulting from them – behaved differently.

Since the project’s inception, several astronauts – including Marc Garneau, Mike Fincke and Thirsk himself – have taken Tomatosphere seeds to expose them to space conditions. In 2006, students compared terrestrial seeds to those that had spent 19 months aboard the International Space Station.

OCE supports Tomatosphere as part of its initiatives to inspire the next generation of science and technology innovators. Programs like this spark a lifelong interest in youth, and ignite their imaginations with the possibilities of the future. Richard Worsfold, Director of Business Development, Ontario Centres of Excellence, accepted the Award last night at the CASI AERO2007 Awards Banquet in Toronto.

“It takes 15 to 20 years to become a scientist; we’ve got to get kids hooked now. To be competitive, Canada needs bright minds focused on innovation and discovery in science. Tomatosphere responded to the urgent need for educating young Canadians in the unique and challenging areas of space life sciences,” said Worsfold.



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About Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE) Inc.

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. In doing this, OCE fosters the training and development of the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs and is a key partner with Ontario's industry, universities, colleges, research hospitals, investors and governments. Celebrating 20 years of innovation in 2007, OCE's five Centres work in communications and information technology, earth and environmental technologies, energy, materials and manufacturing and photonics.

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