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NASA, MAVERICKS LAUNCH STUDY OF EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE

MOFFETT FIELD, Calif. – NASA's Ames Research Center and Mavericks Civilian Space Foundation, Moffett Field, Calif., today announced a collaboration to develop a high-altitude high-velocity air sampling system for NASA biological experiments.

Under the terms of a Space Act Agreement, Mavericks, in collaboration with NASA scientists, will develop and operate airborne science platforms to carry biological sampling devices and retrieve organisms, such as microbes, algal spores, viruses, and fungi, and other evidence of life from lower atmosphere to the upper atmosphere, or more than 78 miles above the surface of Earth. Mavericks will provide payload launch capabilities, instrumentation on sounding rockets and research balloons, and facilitate NASA flights on other space vehicles.

"This partnership allows NASA to conduct Earth science in an exciting new way and learn more about life, our planet and atmosphere in an effective, rapid and cost-efficient manner," said Ames Center Director S. Pete Worden.

Lynn Rothschild, an astrobiologist at NASA's Ames Research Center, will lead the research efforts to study life in the upper portions of the stratosphere and mesosphere, the middle layers of Earth's atmosphere between five and 78 miles above the surface of Earth, the biology present in clouds and the extent of airborne algal blooms. Rothschild will design and test the aerobiology and astrobiology experimental payloads and analyze returned samples.

"In an era where we have powerful technologies to study the diversity of life on Earth, the biology of Earth's atmosphere remains a relative mystery," said Rothschild. "We know more about life at the bottom of the ocean. And, until we understand life in our own atmosphere, we cannot understand the true limits for life on Earth and by extension, the possibility for life in the atmosphere of other planets or moons, most notably Venus."

“This collaboration begins a new chapter in civilian partnership with NASA to not only jointly attain the answer to a fundamental question in biology, but also to re-inspire and re-engage our youth to demonstrate their mastery of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education principles through participation, as part of our efforts to drive STEM education through research,” said Thomas Atchison, Mavericks Civilian Space Foundation founder and chairperson.

Mavericks is a non-profit 501(c)3 educational foundation that combines raising public awareness through the inspiration and productivity of competitive challenges, with the leverage of social networking to provide resources for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education and research programs that drive civilian space exploration.

The agreement is in accordance with the National Space Policy, under which NASA will expand its partnerships with private industry, allowing commercial companies to take a larger role in the exploration of space, while NASA pursues activities the agency is uniquely qualified to do.

For more information about NASA Ames Research Center, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov/ames>

For more information about the Mavericks Civilian Space Foundation, visit:

<http://www.rocketmavericks.com/>