

Celebrating Women in Science Initiative Launches at Connecticut Science Center

Two-year initiative supported by the Petit Family Foundation

Hartford, CT- April 30, 2013- The Connecticut Science Center is pleased to announce the launch of a new initiative, ***Celebrating Women in Science***. Through special programs and events, the Science Center will draw attention to the accomplishments of women in the sciences as well as inspire girls and young women to pursue interests in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields of study and career paths.

Celebrating Women in Science is already experiencing interest and support from the community, most notably from the Petit Family Foundation, which has joined with the Science Center as the Founding Sponsor of this initiative. “Addressing the gender gap in the sciences has been a major interest of ours for a number of years,” says Science Center President & CEO Matt Fleury. “We are grateful to the Petit Family Foundation for helping us bring more attention to this important issue.”

Weekend family programs, special events, stepped-up staff training in gender and cultural awareness, and a scavenger hunt are among the elements that the Science Center plans to roll out over the next two years as part of this initiative.

Celebrating Women in Science kicked off at the Science Center on April 30, with a lecture event attended by community leaders. Keynote speaker Laura Huerta Migus, Director of Professional Development and Inclusion for the Association of Science & Technology Centers (ASTC), discussed the barriers to women participating in STEM, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, and the essential role that science centers play in encouraging women to persist in STEM pathways and knitting together stakeholders invested in making positive change on this issue.

Though women make up slightly more than half of the U.S. population, women comprise just 32 percent of physicians, 25 percent of mathematical or computer scientists, and a mere 10 percent of engineers, according to a 2011 report from the National Science Foundation. Research from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the Girl Scouts shows that underperformance of girls and underrepresentation of women in science and math are related to cultural bias associating men with STEM fields. Last February, *The New York Times* reported that girls in Asia and Eastern Europe consistently outperformed boys of their age group on a test in which U.S. boys outperformed their female peers. The takeaway? Stereotypes are the barrier to women in the sciences, not ability.

The Connecticut Science Center is keenly aware that the scope of this effort is sizeable. “It isn’t enough to inspire a single girl to study chemistry, or hire a single female engineer,” Fleury said. “We need to change the whole cultural landscape so that any girl with an affinity for science feels supported and encouraged to pursue her interest.”

Visitors to the Science Center’s upcoming traveling exhibit, *MathAlive!* (opening in May) will have an opportunity to encounter women who use math and science every day at work. “The truth is, subconsciously, many of us simply don’t associate women with science or math. That has to change,” Fleury said. With *Celebrating Women in Science*, the Science Center is taking a lead role in making that change. Programming associated with this initiative will show parents, teachers and the community (not just girls themselves) that science is for everyone.

With 300,000 annual visitors, and a reputation among teachers and families as a major resource for fun and educational programs, the Connecticut Science Center is well positioned to promote positive and inspirational examples of the achievements of women in various STEM fields. A celebration of women in science over the next two years will be one more important step in solidifying the Science Center as “the center of science” in the state.

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About the Connecticut Science Center The LEED-Gold certified Connecticut Science Center, located in downtown Hartford, sparks creative imagination and an appreciation for science by immersing visitors in fun and educational hands-on, minds-on interactive experiences while maintaining an environmentally conscious presence. With more than 1,000,000 people served since opening in 2009, visitors experience more than 150 exhibits in ten galleries and a range of topics, including space and earth sciences, physical sciences, biology, the Connecticut River watershed, alternative energy sources, Connecticut inventors and innovations, a children's gallery, and much more. Other features include four educational labs, a 200-seat 3D digital theater, function room, gift store and café, and ongoing events and lectures for all ages. The Science Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing science education throughout the state of Connecticut and New England, providing learning opportunities for students and adults of all ages, and engaging the community in scientific exploration. More information: www.CTScienceCenter.org or 860.SCIENCE.

About the Petit Family Foundation The Petit Family Foundation honors the memories of Jennifer Hawke-Petit, Hayley Elizabeth Petit and Michaela Rose Petit by continuing the kindness, idealism, and activism that defined their lives. The Foundation's funds are given to foster the education of young people, especially women in the science; to improve the lives of those affected by chronic illness; and to support efforts to protect and help those affected by violence. In addition to Celebrating Women in Science, The Petit Family Foundation sponsors Michaela's Garden, an interactive program at the Science Center to inspire young girls and children about the field of horticulture.