

# 12-year, four-planet ride ends at Neptune

By Joeth Zucco  
Senior Editor

Mankind took another giant step this summer.

It saw Neptune and its moons up close and gathered enough information to keep scientists busy making discoveries for years.

Jack Dunn, coordinator of Mueller Planetarium, said the discoveries may lead to theories about the way the Earth may have been millions of years ago. But the discoveries won't be made overnight.

Dunn said much of the reporting and education was incorrect at the time of the television and satellite broadcasts.

"Scientists were misrepresented," he said. "It'll take some time for the findings to be completely analyzed. The press was expecting scientists to do instant science, but it'll take years to digest all that data."

The planetarium's satellite system, donated a year ago by General Instruments, allowed several hundred people to watch transmissions from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. During the three-day period

when Voyager 2 was closest to Neptune and its moons, the JPL received transmissions through the deep space network then rebroadcast those images with interviews and updates to satellites all over the country.

Dunn said the JPL wanted to do the program as a special event so museums and planetariums could pick up the transmissions.

"It all started with the moon landings," Dunn said. "Landing on the moon was something we shared together. We all watched it together. Nobody predicted the moon landing."

"Everyone was able to share in the discovery of Neptune and that's a big change. That's why our way of seeing things is changing because we can go along for the ride."

The ride started in 1977. Since its launch, Voyager 2 has encountered Jupiter, July 1979; Saturn, August 1981; and Uranus, January 1986.

Discoveries on Jupiter and its planets include a varied geology with volcanos on Io and three smaller satellites. Rings of fine dust

were discovered as were cloud-top lightning bolts.

Saturn's discoveries included a nitrogen atmosphere on Titan, a complex ring system and more satellites.

Uranus was discovered to have a very low internal heat source, receiving only about 15 percent of solar energy. A broad ring system

was discovered containing boulder-sized particles as well as ten new satellites.

Dunn said that at one time people believed Neptune and Uranus to be twin planets, but the Voyager 2 discoveries have proven that wrong. Dunn said that he

See NEPTUNE on 12

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