Satellite stories featured in Lab lecture series

February 14, 2008

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, February 14, 2008 --When the first of Los Alamos National Laboratory's small satellites, ALEXIS, was released into space in the spring of 1993, one of the spacecraft's solar panels tore free of its hinge attachment during launch, sending its ground crew into despair and weeks of uncertainty as they waited to see if the satellite would ever "wake up." It did, and ALEXIS went on to successfully stream data to the Los Alamos ground station for more than a decade.

This, and other tales of space adventures, will be featured in the upcoming Frontiers in Science lecture series "Small Satellites on a Shoestring: The LANL Experience." The first scheduled talk by Diane Roussel-Dupre of Los Alamos's Space Data Systems group is at 7 p.m., Tuesday, February 19 in the Nick Salazar Center for the Arts at Northern New Mexico College in Española.

Other scheduled talks are February 21, James A. Little Theater, New Mexico School for the Deaf, 1060 Cerrillos Road, Santa Fe; February 26, Duane Smith Auditorium, Los Alamos High School, 1300 Diamond Drive, Los Alamos; February 28, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, 2401 12th Street N.W., Albuquerque.

These talks also begin at 7 p.m. and all are free and open to the public.

While the post-ALEXIS small-satellite missions have not been without their “oh, no” moments, the ALEXIS example clearly shows that space-bound technology development is not for the faint of heart. Following ALEXIS’ near-fatal adventure came FORTE, the lightning detection satellite, and Cibola, a supercomputer in space.

Roussel-Dupre will discuss highlights and low points of the various small-satellite missions, and touch on the 40 years of the space instrumentation the Laboratory has provided to NASA and a range of other government organizations.

The Frontiers in Science lecture series is sponsored by the Fellows of the Laboratory. Frontiers in Science lectures are intended to increase local public awareness of the diversity of science and engineering research being conducted by the Laboratory.

For more information on the Frontiers in Science series, contact Linda Anderman of the Laboratory’s Community Programs Office at 665-9196 or anderman@lanl.gov by electronic mail.