



Mars discussion draws large virtual crowd

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Social distancing might have limited the opportunities for the Laboratory's normal in-person science events and lectures, but that won't stop us finding a way to talk about the exciting work that goes on in Los Alamos.

A discussion on the search for past life on Mars featuring Laboratory researcher Nina Lanza drew a virtual audience of more than 500 people Oct. 7.

In conversation with nuclear scientist Jeff Favorite, Lanza outlined how the new Perseverance rover carries the tools to search for signs of past microbial life and will also gather samples for a future return mission from Mars to Earth.

As a planetary scientist and team lead for Space and Planetary Exploration, Lanza also gave insight into her work on the current Curiosity Rover mission, including what it's like to control a rover on Mars from your home during lockdown.

"I think it's really important for scientists to come out of the laboratory every so often to talk to non-scientists about what we're doing," says Lanza. "Not only are we funded by the public, but we're also doing work that can have a significant impact on the broader community and the world as a whole. Also, I love sharing my excitement about exploring the universe!"

The wide-ranging conversation also explored the many contributions other Los Alamos scientists and engineers have made to both the Perseverance and Curiosity programs.

The event was the latest talk in the long-running Frontiers in Science series hosted by the Laboratory, and presented by the Laboratory Fellows. The talks normally take place in person in venues in Los Alamos, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque, but the pandemic led to a move online, and a chance to reach a wider audience and incorporate some new features.

Thanks to the work of educator Mel Strong and others at the Bradbury Science Museum, informative slides and Martian landscapes appeared behind the speakers, and through some camera trickery, Favorite and Lanza appeared to be beside each other while they were actually safely socially distanced. Questions for the audience helped guide the discussion.

"Jeff and I had a great time chatting together, although it was sometimes hard to imagine that there were hundreds of other people there with us!" says Lanza. "It is always fun to answer questions from the public to hear what folks are thinking about and what is sparking their curiosity."

A [recording of the event is available here](#).

*Kathy Keith,
Director, Community Partnerships Office,
Los Alamos National Laboratory*

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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