



PUBLIC RELATIONS

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CHIEF ASTRONOMER DERRICK PITTS
HEADS TO THE WHITE HOUSE

Philadelphia, PA, October 6, 2009 – International Year of Astronomy Spokesperson and The Franklin Institute’s Chief Astronomer **Derrick Pitts** has been invited to the White House tomorrow night. President Obama has made a commitment to science, engineering and math education as the foundation of this nation's global technological and economic leadership, and to express his support for astronomy in particular, the White House will host a star party for middle-school students on Wednesday, October 7. Pitts is an invited guest of the President and First Lady, chosen as part of a select group of astronomers to guide the 150 students through a tour of the heavens from the White House South Lawn. Using The Franklin Institute’s telescope, shipped to D.C. last week, Pitts is only one of 3 non-NASA personnel demonstrating at tomorrow’s star party.

President Obama will kick-off tomorrow’s event with a brief address that will be streamed live on the [White House](#) website and by [NASA TV](#) (estimated beginning at 8 pm EDT). The program at the White House includes more than 20 telescopes set up on the White House lawn focused on Jupiter, the Moon and select stars; interactive dome presentations, and hands-on activities including scale models of the Solar System, impact cratering, and investigating meteorites and Moon rocks.

In continuing with The Franklin Institute’s World Space Week celebration, Derrick Pitts returns to Philadelphia to host the popular monthly series *Night Skies in the Observatory* on Thursday, October 8, guiding visitors through the very same night sky. Pitts was named International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) Spokesperson in January. Launched in January by The International Astronomical Union and endorsed by UNESCO, IYA2009 is a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture.

The Franklin Institute is known for blockbuster exhibits, one-of-a-kind theatrical experiences, a growing roster of evening events for adults, and cutting-edge community learning (including a high school partnership with the School District of Philadelphia) with national influence. All are aimed at explaining science in ways that impact on people’s lives. Founded in honor of America’s first scientist, Benjamin Franklin, the mission of

The Franklin Institute is to inspire an understanding of and passion for science and technology learning. For more information, please visit www.fi.edu.