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**THE FRANKLIN'S CHIEF ASTRONOMER, DERRICK PITTS,  
IS NAMED US SPOKESPERSON FOR *INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ASTRONOMY***

**Philadelphia, PA—March 2, 2009**—The Franklin Institute's Chief Astronomer **Derrick Pitts** has been named the United States spokesperson for the **International Year of Astronomy (IYA 2009)**. 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. It marks the 400th anniversary of Galileo Galilei's first astronomical observation through a telescope - an event that changed science forever.

"The *International Year of Astronomy* is an extraordinary opportunity for astronomers everywhere to present astronomy to the global community and encourage people around the world to experience the sense of discovery and excitement that comes from observing the wonders of the universe," said Derrick Pitts.

Pitts has been an integral part of Philadelphia's Franklin Institute since 1978, the Chief Astronomer and Director of the Fels Planetarium since 1990, and a scientific consultant to numerous organizations such as Lockheed Martin and NASA. A respected voice in the field of astronomy, he has written countless articles and essays on popular astronomy and appears frequently on broadcast media to add expert commentary.

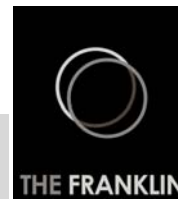
As part of the celebration, The Franklin will soon open the exclusive world exhibition, *Galileo, the Medici and the Age of Astronomy*. Marking the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Galileo's astronomical discoveries, the exhibition will explore the extraordinary impact of Galileo's work, as well as that of other luminaries during the age of the Medicis - and will feature one of two remaining telescopes owned and built by Galileo. The one-time only special exhibition was created in partnership with the *Istituto e Museo della Storia di Scienza* of Florence, Philadelphia's Sister City, and the Medici Archive Project and is presented by the Italian fine watchmaking company Officine Panerai, in recognition of its Tuscan origins and tradition linked to the measurement of time. The Franklin was chosen following hundreds of requests for loans of Galileo's telescope during this extraordinary anniversary year.

The Franklin will be a key player in the launch of a cornerstone project for IYA 2009 -- "100 Hours of Astronomy." Beginning April 2 the 100 Hours of Astronomy will be a round-the-clock, worldwide event featuring 100 continuous hours of a wide range of public outreach activities, including live webcasts, observing events and more. From the Pacific Science Center in Seattle to the world-renowned Deutsches Museum in Munich - numerous organizations, both within the United States and globally, are participating in the event. The Franklin's will anchor an educational event that will link science centers throughout the world for a 100HA webcast, a major lecture on Galileo, and a public observatory event.

Other United States highlights include:

- A NASA designation of March 8-28 for a Saturn Observation Campaign to showcase the

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splendor of that planet, and a series of monthly lectures at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of California Institute of Technology, all accessible via webcast.

- The Bryce Canyon Astronomy Festival, June 17-20, is only one of the special programs planned to celebrate the wonder of the dark night sky in lands under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. “From Earth to the Universe,” will display magical images captured by ground and space-based telescopes to a wide audience in non-traditional settings such as parks and shopping malls.
- “The Artists’ Universe” collection of work in various styles and media curated by the International Association of Astronomical Artists will also travel the country.
- The official IYA2009 documentary, “400 Years of the Telescope,” will debut on PBS in April, hosted by Derrick Pitts.

To continue The Franklin’s celebration of the IYA2009 and the Galileo exhibit, an ongoing exhibit lecture series is planned, with topics ranging from modern-day astronomical discoveries to the challenges of politics and religion to Galileo’s efforts. The Franklin’s popular monthly “Night Skies” observatory events, hosted by Pitts, will significantly widen its outreach and activities. The Franklin Institute’s prestigious Franklin Awards, later in April of 2009, will also have a “cosmos” theme for its major Bower medalist.

**The Franklin Institute**, one of the nation’s preeminent science museums, has doubled its attendance in the last five years. Upgraded facilities, which range from a re-built heart to a 5,000 square foot store to blockbuster exhibits like *Titanic*, *BodyWorlds* and *Tut* have generated unprecedented attention and audiences. Increasingly a “go-to” destination, The Franklin 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 is to inspire an understanding of and passion for science and technology learning. For more information, please visit [www.fi.edu](http://www.fi.edu).

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