

Chabot Staff Available for Media Interviews

Alexander Zwissler – Executive Director & CEO

Ben Burress – Astronomer

Conrad Jung – Astronomer

Eric Havel – Environmental Specialist

Alexander Zwissler, Executive Director & CEO

Zwissler returned home to his native Oakland when he was appointed Executive Director & CEO of Chabot Space & Science Center on April 23, 2007. As the executive director of San Francisco's Fort Mason Foundation from 1999-2006, Zwissler oversaw an organization that provided 15,000 cultural, educational and recreation programs serving 1.6 million visitors annually. A 1975 graduate of Oakland's Skyline High, Zwissler spent the previous 17 years as an executive in the cable television industry. Zwissler has a B.A. in political science from UC-Berkeley. He went on to become a postgraduate research fellow at the University of Leicester, England.

Ben Burress, Astronomer

Burress has been a Chabot staff astronomer since July 1999, 13 months before the opening of CSSC's state-of-the-art facility. After graduating from Sonoma State University with a bachelor's degree in physics (minoring in astronomy), Burress signed on for a two-year stint in the Peace Corps, where he taught physics and mathematics in Cameroon. From 1989-96, he was a crew member of NASA's Kuiper Airborne Observatory at Ames Research Center in Mountain View, CA – the program which is credited with the discovery of the rings of Uranus. There he flew semi-weekly eight-hour missions above 41,000 feet (clear of Earth's troposphere) in a specially modified C-141 "Starlifter" military cargo plane in order to take infrared readings of astronomical objects

From 1996-99, Burress helped pioneer the Naval Prototype Optical Interferometer program at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, AZ, the facility where Pluto was discovered. The interferometer program, the first of its kind, allows astronomers to simulate a telescope of enormous breadth (and power) by combining readings from two telescopes in different locations. Burress is an accomplished public speaker whose unique style and easy manner cuts through scientific jargon and makes him a popular interview subject.

Conrad Jung, Astronomer

Jung is renowned as one of the nation's premier astrophotographers. Three of his photographs – of the Trifid Nebula, the Pleiades star cluster and a total lunar eclipse sequence – were featured in a three-month Smithsonian Institute exhibition in 2006. Jung (the “J” is pronounced, not silent) is Chabot's longest-serving employee. He was hired in 1978 as a part-time teacher's assistant under Kingsley Wightman, the pioneer of Chabot's education program. Over nearly three decades, Jung has seen more than 150,000 students pass through his astronomy classes at Chabot. Jung has captured hundreds of images from the night sky over the past 30 years by marrying camera and telescope in a variety of creative ways. His Smithsonian exhibition was praised by that institution's curator of Space History for its ingenious rigging - a Canon 20Da digital SLR camera mounted on a rare 7-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope.

Eric Havel, Environmental Specialist

A Chabot Space & Science Center employee since 1998, Havel has spearheaded Chabot's intense focus on environmental issues since the opening of its state-of-the-art facility high in the Oakland hills in August 2000. Havel (rhymes with gravel) graduated from the University of California-Berkeley with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Sciences. He serves as the board vice-president for the Friends of Sausal Creek, a watershed advocacy group that works to preserve and restore Oakland's Sausal Creek ecosystem. He pioneered Chabot's EnviroGarden program after procuring a grant from Stopwaste.org and is the driving force behind CSSC's environmental teaching program, which now includes five classes for k-12 students. Havel is adept at breaking down complicated environmental issues and is an expert of a wide array of environmental issues, including: global warming; sustainable development; green design and infrastructure; watershed preservation; redwood forest ecosystems; and Bay Area ecology.

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Please contact Communications & Media Coordinator, Robert Ade at (510) 336-7310 or email RAde@ChabotSpace.org, to schedule an interview.

Chabot Space & Science Center, a Smithsonian affiliate, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit interactive science center whose mission is to inspire and educate students of all ages about Planet Earth and the Universe. Founded in 1883, the Center is located at 10000 Skyline Blvd. just off Highway 13 in the Oakland hills. For more information, visit www.chabotspace.org.