



Vanderbilt Will Take Science on the Road: Traveling Astronomy Classroom, *Discovering the Universe*, to Debut June 5 at the Suffolk County Legislature

CENTERPORT, NY (May 23, 2012) – The Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum will begin a science-education outreach program to Long Island schools with its new traveling exhibition, *Discover the Universe*. The 37-foot-long, customized recreational vehicle – a traveling science and astronomy classroom – was a gift to the Vanderbilt from the American Museum of Natural History.

The traveling classroom will be making its public debut at the June 5 general meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature in Hauppauge, New York. Planetarium educators will be onboard the vehicle to demonstrate the technical teaching aspects of the traveling classroom.

Lance Reinheimer, interim executive director of the Vanderbilt, said: “*Discovering the Universe* is an intriguing, hands-on program inside a high-tech mobile classroom. We are very grateful to our friends and colleagues at the American Museum of Natural History for this gift, which will enable us to enhance the Vanderbilt’s longtime role as an adjunct to the science curriculum in local elementary and middle schools. *Discovering the Universe* perfectly complements Vanderbilt Planetarium programs by providing students with observation principles for studying space.”

The Vanderbilt Planetarium, currently undergoing a complete renovation and technological update, is scheduled to reopen in October 2012.

William Lindsay, presiding officer of the Suffolk County Legislature, said, “It’s exciting news that the Vanderbilt Museum will now be able to take its astronomy-education programs directly to local schools. The Traveling Museum will greatly enhance the Vanderbilt’s effectiveness as an educational resource.”

Discovering the Universe will offer opportunities to explore astronomy in ways not previously possible for students. In astronomy, vast distances separate scientists and educators from



Inside *Discovering the Universe*, the traveling Vanderbilt Planetarium astronomy classroom

the objects of study. This makes it difficult for teachers to make astronomy tangible and meaningful to students. All too often, astronomy seems distant, unapproachable and disconnected from a student's everyday experiences.

Computer technology allows students to learn about astronomy and astrophysics in a way that is engaging, stimulating and fun. *Discovering the Universe* vividly illustrates the challenges astronomers face when trying to study objects billions of miles away, and it provides a glimpse of the ingenious strategies scientists have developed to overcome these challenges.



Photos courtesy of American Museum of Natural History

Discovering the Universe traveling classroom

The Vanderbilt is currently seeking partnerships with the Long Island business and science community to support *Discovering the Universe* as well as the institution's planetarium, science and astronomy-related education programs, which are aligned with New York State curriculum standards.

The traveling classroom contains five stations – Light, Telescopes, Digital Imaging, 3-D Universe and Gravity. While each is a self-contained module, a single underlying theme connects the information and ideas offered in *Discovering the Universe*.

Educators from the Vanderbilt Planetarium and the museum's Education Department will work with science teachers at various Long Island schools.



Students use one of the five computer stations in the traveling classroom to study aspects of astronomy