

# NEW HORIZONS

NASA's Pluto-Kuiper Belt Mission



+ HEADLINES

+ NEW HORIZONS IN THE NEWS

+ RESOURCES

+ SCHEDULE/EVENTS

+ MEDIA CONTACTS

+ 75 YEARS OF PLUTO

## Headlines

For Immediate Release  
**June 29, 2006**

### Pluto-Bound, Student-Built Dust Detector Renamed "Venetia," Honoring Girl Who Named Ninth Planet

The student-built science instrument on NASA's New Horizons mission to Pluto has been renamed to honor one of astronomy's most famous students - the "little girl" who named the ninth planet more than 75 years ago.

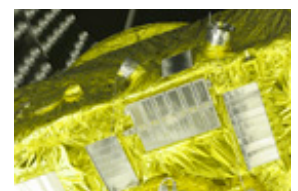
For the rest of the New Horizons spacecraft's voyage to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt beyond, the Student Dust Counter - the first science instrument on a NASA planetary mission to be designed, built and operated by students - will be known as the Venetia Burney Student Dust Counter (VBSDC), or "Venetia" for short. The tag honors Venetia Burney Phair, who at age 11 offered the name "Pluto" for the newly discovered ninth planet in 1930.

"It's fitting that we name an instrument built by students after Mrs. Phair, who was just a grade-school student herself in England when she made her historic suggestion of a name for Pluto," says Dr. Alan Stern, the New Horizons mission principal investigator, of the Southwest Research Institute, Boulder, Colo. "It's also a great honor to recognize Mrs. Phair for her historic, early role in the saga of the ninth planet."

"I feel quite astonished, and to have an instrument named after me is an honor," says Venetia Burney Phair, now 87 and living in Epsom, England. "I never dreamt when I was 11, that after all these years, people would still be thinking about this and even sending a probe to Pluto. It's remarkable."

The instrument, designed, built and currently operated by students and faculty advisors at the University of Colorado, Boulder, begins full science operations in July after a series of post-launch tests

*Click on the thumbnail image for a larger version and caption.*



and checkouts.

Officially a mission Education and Public Outreach project, "Venetia" is counting and measuring dust particle impacts on New Horizons along the spacecraft's entire trajectory to produce information on their production, transport and loss and, by inference, the population of comets and other distant colliding bodies that are too small to detect with telescopes. The dust counter could also be used to search for dust in the Pluto system; such dust might be generated by collisions of tiny impactors on Pluto and its moons, Charon, Nix and Hydra.

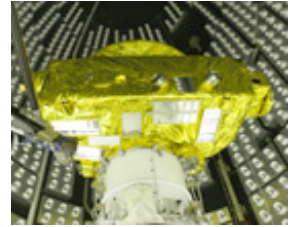
The device combines two major elements: an 18-by-12-inch (45-by-30 centimeter) detector mounted on the outside of the spacecraft, and an electronics box inside the craft that determines the mass and speed of the particles that hit the detector. Because no dust detector has ever flown beyond 18 astronomical units from the Sun (nearly 1.7 billion miles or 2.7 billion kilometers, about the distance from Uranus to the Sun), Venetia's data will give scientists unprecedented measurements of the size and spatial distribution of dust in the outer solar system.

With faculty support, University of Colorado students will also distribute and archive data from the instrument, and lead a comprehensive education and outreach effort to bring their results and experiences to classrooms of all grades over the next two decades.

"The project has involved dozens of students who had a unique opportunity to design, build, test and operate a real instrument in deep space," says Mihaly Horanyi, research associate at the University of Colorado's Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics and principal investigator for the student instrument." Generations of future students will be involved in handing over their skills to the group that follows them."

New Horizons launched from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., on Jan. 19, 2006. It zipped past the orbit of Mars on April 7, and next February will fly through the Jupiter system for science studies and a gravity assist, which will send it toward an historic rendezvous with Pluto and its moons in July 2015. The mission team also hopes to examine one or more objects in the Kuiper Belt beyond Pluto in succeeding years.

The spacecraft was built and is being operated at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Md., which manages the New Horizons



mission for NASA. SwRI's Stern leads the mission and the science team as principal investigator.

*On the Web:*

- For more information on the instrument, visit <http://lasp.colorado.edu/sdc/>
- Read and listen to a January 2006 NASA interview with Venetia Burney Phair at: [http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/podcasting/transcript\\_pluto\\_naming\\_podcast.html](http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/podcasting/transcript_pluto_naming_podcast.html)

---

**Media Contact:**

Michael Buckley  
(240) 228-7536 or (443) 778-7536  
[michael.buckley@jhuapl.edu](mailto:michael.buckley@jhuapl.edu)

Editor: JHU/APL Webmaster  
JHU/APL Official: Kerri Beisser  
Last verified: 7/12/2006  
+ Contact JHU/APL