Featured Stories

PSD Hosts Third Annual 9/11 Pancake Breakfast

By Vincent Robbins

JPL's Protective Services Division hosted its third annual Commemorative 9/11 Pancake Breakfast at the JPL Firehouse to remember the victims and first responders of Sept. 11, 2001.

To begin the event, JPL security officers and firefighters raised and then lowered the American flag to half-mast outside of Building 310's fire apparatus bay. Then, over the course of the morning, hundreds of JPLers turned out to enjoy breakfast with colleagues and observe moments of silence for each of the four attacks: the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and United Flight 93.

JPL Fire Chief Dave Dollarhide said the event is "not only to remember, but to bring the JPL community together, to socialize with fellow employees, and to take a short break from our important jobs while enjoying delicious pancakes, as we honor the fallen heroes and citizens of that day."

(L to R) MSL Project Scientist Ashwin Vasavada, MSL Project Manager Kathya Garcia, M2020 Project Manager Art Thompson, and M2020 Project Scientist Katie Stack drive the ceremonial "Golden Spike" into the cake.

MSL and M2020 Celebrate Their "Golden Spike" Moment

By Vincent Robbins

On July 17, 2025 — or Sol 4554 for Curiosity and Sol 1519 for Perseverance — Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) and Mars 2020 teams gathered to celebrate what they called the "Golden Spike," a moment in which the two rovers had traversed the exact same distance on Mars.

To celebrate, team leaders drove a little Golden Spike into a cake — a symbol originating from the transcontinental railroad days that signifies a milestone moment of a significant endeavor.

"Reaching 35 kilometers of traverse on Mars is a significant milestone for both Curiosity and Perseverance, highlighting the durability and engineering excellence of these rovers and the teams behind them," said MSL Project Manager Kathya Zamora Garcia. "For MSL, this distance represents over a decade of continuous exploration, ascending almost 900 m in elevation from the floor of Gale crater and up the flank of Mt Sharp, and delivering unprecedented science along the way."

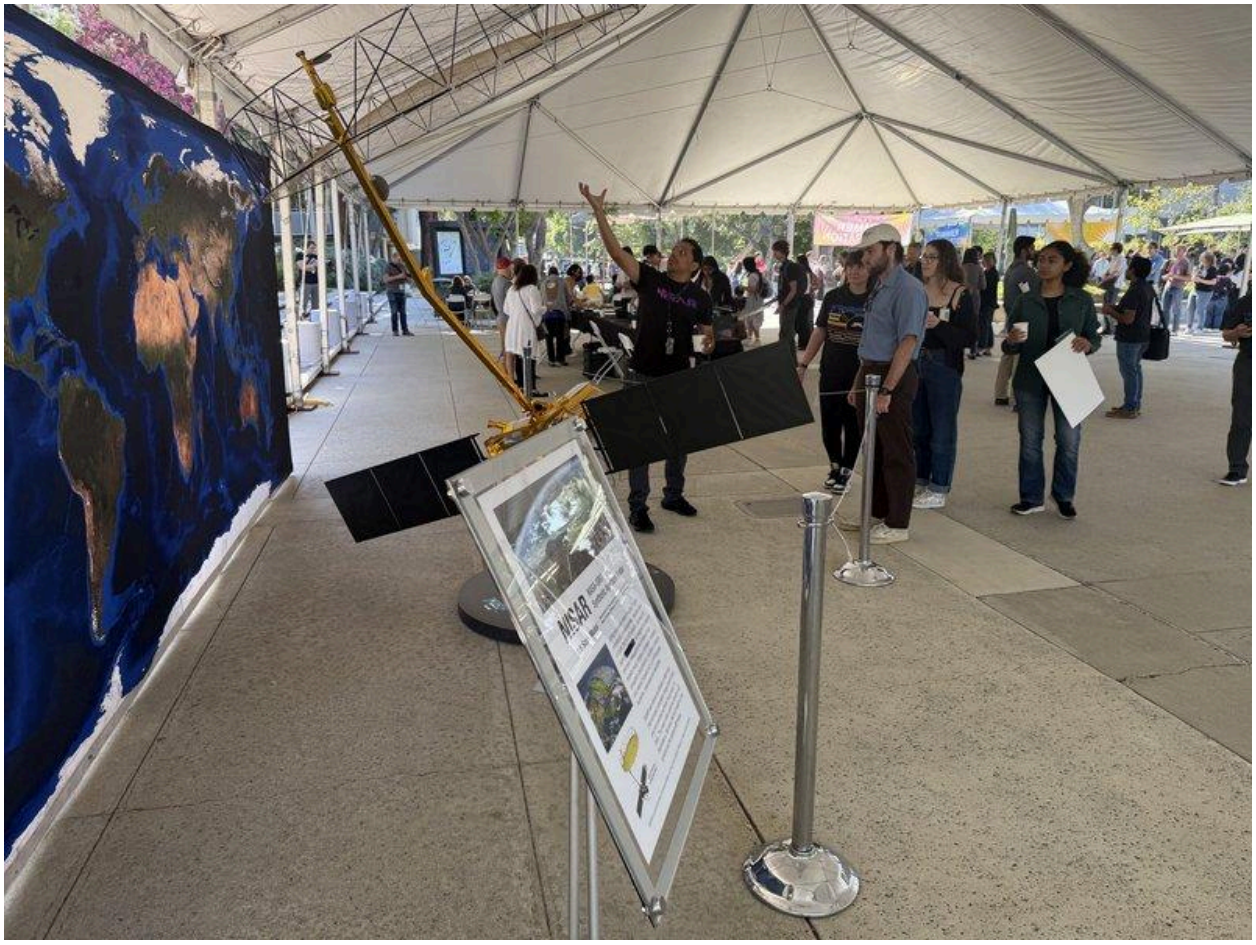
Although it arrived nearly 9 years later, Perseverance made up for lost time, covering the same amount of ground in just over 4 years.

"There has always existed friendly competition between Perseverance and our older sibling Curiosity," said M2020 Project Manager Art Thompson. "This was an opportunity to bring both Curiosity's and Perseverance's ops teams together to celebrate the fact that both vehicles had traversed over 35 kilometers, and our missions continue."

A NISAR Toast to Tea-mwork

Inspired by the tea breaks shared between JPL and ISRO team members in India, JPLers descended on the Mall on July 30 to enjoy Masala Chai, traditional Parle-G biscuits, and their colleagues' company following the successful NISAR launch.

Image Credit: PhotoLab



The event offered a chance to connect, reflect, and take part in community — complete with mission swag raffles, a special coaster giveaway, and an up-close look at the NISAR spacecraft model.

JPL Family News

Retirees

The following JPL employees recently announced their retirements:

Javier Ramos, Org 2622, 41 years
Eric Kurzweil, Org 352K, 35 years
Gregory Garner, Org 3000, 34 years
Stephanie L. Granger, Org 3980, 33 years
James A. Prikosovits, Org 2100, 26 years
Richard P. Kornfeld, Org 3100, 26 years

Passings

Passings must be submitted through Human Resources, which coordinates with the family of the deceased.

Owen Cowherd Jr. died on Aug. 24, 2025 at the age of 92. He worked at JPL for 35 years in property management and retired in the early 1990s as a senior administrative assistant.

After his retirement, Owen and his wife embarked on world travels, visiting France, Italy, Spain, and cruising through Alaska and Hawaii. They shared 74 years of marriage before his beloved wife's passing in April 2024. He is survived by his daughter, Kelly Cowherd.

Owen also experienced the significant loss of his home of 50 years in the Eaton Fire. Despite this hardship, he lived a great life.

Richard "Dick" Wallace, a retired mission designer who originated the JPL peanut tradition for JPL mission personnel, passed away on June 12, 2025 at age 84 in Cloverdale CA. In 1978 to 1982, as a member of the Advanced Projects Group (Any Body, Any Time), he led numerous studies that provided mission options for the NASA planetary program. In 1972 he was a member of the team that developed options for what became the Voyager missions to the four outer planets. Those spacecraft launched in 1977, are still returning data from beyond the solar system -part of Dick's legacy.

Born in NY, Dick earned a bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Engineering in 1962 from Princeton, and in 1964 a Master's in Aeronautical/Aerospace Engineering from the University of Washington before joining JPL. In 1964 Dick was a member of the Ranger operations team. After six failures to reach and provide close up images of the moon, JPL was under intense national scrutiny for the seventh launch, he brought in peanuts. " I thought they might take some of the edge off the anxiety the mission operations room. The rest is history" Ranger 7 was a resounding success

that supported the Apollo Program. The peanuts showed up for each launch, and even showed up on the informal Ranger check lists. A tradition was born and lives on.

Early on, Dick worked on the future of JPL and NASA outer planet missions. In 1977-1978, Dick was a JPL detailee to NASA Headquarters as the NASA Advanced Studies Manager, responsible for planetary exploration future mission studies. In 1978 to 1982, he was the Design Team Leader for future missions: Mariner Mark II, Outer Planet, Shuttle Contingency, Future Mission Models, Plasma Turbulence Explorer, and Close Solar Orbiter Study. In 1985 to 1988, he was Manager for Planetary Observer Studies/Lunar Observer Mission Design. In 1988 he was the Lunar/Mars Unmanned precursor Mission Studies Manager and in 1989 the NASA Headquarters Office of Exploration Science-Engineering Analysis Team Manager.

You could say that Dick Wallace looked to the future, and helped establish a path to get there. Prior to his retirement to the Sonoma Wine Country he was developing a mission to Alpha Centauri, a star system in the southern constellation of Centaurus.

Dick is survived by his wife of 40 years, Madeline Wallace, whom he met on the SP-100 Project at JPL, his daughter, Dr. Cary Finale, whom he was so very proud of, and his loving brother Robert Wallace.

-This obituary was mostly written by some of Dick's fellow retirees.

With respect and admiration, we remember the life of **Frederick "Fred" Whitney Mintz**, who passed away on June 28th, 2025, at the age of 92 in Bellingham, WA., with his wife Kathy by his side. Fred was born on June 1st, 1933, in Los Angeles, CA, to Mildred A. Bush and Jefferson E. Mintz.

Fred is survived by his daughters, Nancy Mintz and Debrah Clemons, her children Marcus and Michael Rosen; his wife, Kathy Mintz; her sons Max, Wesley, Jeff, and Kenneth Rodriguez and his daughters, Skylar and Madalynn.

Fred lived a life defined by purpose. He was a man who saw the world both by its beauty and complexity. He was a natural problem solver and visionary. He lived a long and meaningful life of exploration and engagement across a variety of professional pursuits. His sharp mind and innate interest in technology led him to always ask "why?" This prompted him to participate in research across a broad spectrum of scientific inquiry and invention. He published multiple papers in professional journals and produced over thirty patents.

Fred was abandoned when he was a child. This trauma at such an early stage of development caused Fred to always look up to God; he would lie on the ground, stare at the sky, and plead with God for answers to his questions about the universe. When others reached out for answers, Fred looked up. As an adult, Fred attended and worked at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Divinity. His spiritual drive led him to take a shepherding role as the founding pastor of three churches, an experience that led to everlasting friendships.

One of Fred's great joys in life was tackling problems and leading teams toward solutions. His keen mind and skills in organization and delegation produced positive results in all his professional pursuits, including his years of service as a volunteer Reserve Officer with the Los Angeles Police Department. In that role, he contributed his technological and leadership skills. He was very pleased to be asked to participate in the preparations and provision of security during the Olympic Games in 1984, earning a Department Outstanding Achievement Medal for his efforts and another one for his role during the visit of Pope John XXIII.

While serving in the LAPD reserve. Fred described the experience as "giving him a front row seat to the greatest show in town" and helped shape his unique way of looking at the world and the people in it.

During this time, he researched and developed what we now call the RBATS system, an electronic ankle monitoring system used to track individuals under house arrest, probation, and parole, as well as the use of a wristband that could monitor drug and alcohol usage through skin contact, which paved the way for today's smart watches.

During the 1960s, Fred shifted his sights to earthquake research at California Institute of Technology (Caltech). It was the time he spent here that helped prepare him for serving as the founding Vice President of West Coast University, where he procured the funding for their first brick-and-mortar building. He was sent by Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea to help develop advanced underground observation and monitoring systems.

In true Fred style, he was seeking to debunk his wife Kathy's investigation and use of "The Listening Program", a cutting-edge software that uses auditory stimulation to improve cognitive function for children with learning challenges. As a result of his truth-seeking, he discovered the benefits of the program on improving these children's ability to organize their thoughts. Together, they wrote a study validating the effectiveness of "The Listening Program."

Fred Mintz lived a life that blended Science, Theology, Technology, and Engineering. He leaves behind a legacy of deep thinking and will be remembered as a pastor, inventor, protector, and friend – and above all, a man who never stopped seeking the **TRUTH**. He said of himself, "I'm just an ordinary man who sometimes sees when others close their eyes."

Fred's list of accomplishments is too vast for any obituary.

(Please visit www.molesfarewelltributes.com to watch his military service, an in-depth look at his "Vida." And to keep up to date with service information. A memorial service will be held on September 20, 2025, at 2 p.m. at the Community Christian Church 10193 Tujunga Canyon Blvd, 91042. Additional Information can be received by contacting Fred's wife Kathy Mintz – (818)-631-6133)

-This obituary was submitted by Stephenie Garcia of Moles Farewell Tributes – Bayview Chapel.

Awards & Honors

JPLers often Dare Mighty Things, and nearly as often earn awards or professional designations. JPL Space periodically features a roundup of recent honorees. Please join us in congratulating your accomplished colleagues.

Rosaly Lopes
The Harold Masursky Award
"Demonstrated deep and broad dedication to the advancement and health of planetary science in countless ways that extend beyond her duties as a JPL scientist." Award citation

James Keane
The Harold C. Urey Prize
"Awarded the 2025 Harold C. Urey Prize because he has distinguished himself with his broad and impactful research portfolio studying the geophysics of worlds across the Solar System, including the Moon, Io, Arrokoth, Pluto, and Enceladus." Award citation

Murthy Gudipati
CRSI 2026 Medal
"The CRSI (Chemical Research Society of India) medal is conferred on chemists of Indian origin working outside India who have contributed extensively to the promotion of chemical research." Award citation

David Ting, Arezou Khoshakhlagh, Alexander Soibel, Cory Hill, Sir (Don) Rafol, Sam Keo, Brian Pepper, Anita Fisher, and Sarath Gunapala
2025 Space Foundation's Space Technology Hall of Fame
The Space Technology Hall of Fame recognizes the life-changing technologies emerging from global space programs; honors the scientists, engineers and innovators responsible; and communicates to the public the importance of these technologies as a return on investment in space exploration. Award citation

Farah Alibay
Induction to the National Order of Quebec
The National Order of Quebec is the highest honorary distinction awarded by the Quebec government. It is presented annually by the Prime Minister to individuals who have contributed to shaping the state. Alibay was inducted to the Order as a Knight. Award citation

Stephen Unwin
Elected Secretary of American Astronomical Society
The 2025 American Astronomical Society (AAS) election began on Jan. 3 and wrapped up on Feb. 18. Citation

Leadership Appointments

This monthly series highlights recent personnel appointments.

Appointments are listed chronologically and alphabetically for appointments effective on the same date.

Michael P. Brenner: Manager of 7070 Nightshade Project on Aug. 4.

Robert C. Morris: Group Supervisor of 2814 Construction Administration on Aug. 25.