

Featured Stories



JPLers can participate in the United Way campaign in many ways, including food drives.

JPLers Give From Their Hearts and Wallets

By: Jane Platt

JPLers have once again demonstrated that the Lab is not just about brains and creativity--we also have kind hearts and a generous spirit.

This year's annual giving campaign with United Way wrapped up on Friday, Dec. 6 with a half-million-dollar finale. More than 1,330 JPLers supported the campaign with one-time payments or recurring payroll deductions, bringing the donation tally to \$504,098. Those contributions go toward United Way's mission to break the cycle of poverty in L.A. County through housing, education and economic mobility. But there are as many worthy causes as JPLers, and donors also had the option of directing their contribution to the charity of their choice.

As the final numbers came in, Deputy Director Larry James said, "I'm proud every day of the incredible work we do at JPL, and it's gratifying to see the positive response to this worthwhile venture that will benefit our local community and help those less fortunate."

If you missed the giving campaign, you can still donate at JPL's external site for [credit/debit card donations](#), or by emailing uwgive@jpl.nasa.gov.

JPLers are also brightening the holidays for children at Five Acres, a neighbor near the East Gate whose mission is to find permanent, loving homes for children in their care. The annual on-Lab Winter Wishes toy drive has yielded more than 200 gifts so far--including puzzles, stuffed animals, action figures, books, VEX robotics kits, dolls, board games, remote control cars, scooters, even a bicycle.



The Winter Wishes toy drive was set up in the HR trailer.

Elizabeth Loftus, organizer of Winter Wishes, finds the response "heartwarming." She said, "All the toys JPLers provide help make the holidays a magical time of year for these children. I can only imagine the smile and light in their eyes when they discover there is a gift for them."

Some of our colleagues are showing the spirit of giving in other ways. As just one example, for the past several years, a JPLer who prefers to remain anonymous has gathered supplies for backpacks that she gives to homeless people on Christmas Eve.

And although it wasn't specifically a seasonal event, many JPLers rolled up their sleeves and donated blood during the Dec. 3-4 Red Cross blood drive. The bloodmobile rolls up Oak Grove Drive to the Lab a few times a year, so watch for other opportunities to give the gift of life.

At JPL, we can land on Mars, orbit Jupiter, and explore the universe, yet we also make time to help our fellow earthlings.



Patrick "P.J." Guske with his wife and six children.

Modern Families

By: Celeste Hoang

Six years ago, Oleg Sindiy found himself in a peculiar situation. He was standing in the middle of an adoption fair at Crescenta Valley Community Regional Park—which had been decked out with food, arts and crafts tables, bouncy houses, table tennis and a DJ—looking for his future family.

“It was probably one of the weirdest experiences of my life,” he recalls. “It’s a very unnatural thing to walk around talking to kids and viewing them as your potential children.”

Just a year earlier, Sindiy was in a rather enviable position: He had a job he loved as a systems engineer at JPL, great friends, and all the creature comforts he could ask for.

Still, something was missing.

“I wanted the next big adventure in my life,” he recalls. “I naturally arrived at the idea that I wanted to become a father. I’ve always wanted lots of rugrats running around.”

For Sindiy, who grew up in Colorado as the oldest of four siblings raised by a single parent, caring for children was never far from his mind.

“I’ve been that nurturing person for a while,” he says. “My mom was a single mom, so we split the duties. You grow up and you do what you need to.”

Sindiy was ready to do the same and began exploring options on how to become a parent.

“I knew there were already so many kids locally who needed a home that I didn’t feel the need to have a biological child or adopt from abroad,” he says.

He worked with a few different organizations in Los Angeles to understand the foster-to-adoption process, including being certified through the county to become a foster parent and then being licensed through the state of California to become an adoptive parent.

The journey can be an emotional maze to navigate, one that Sindi hopes to address during National Adoption Awareness Month by hosting a panel at JPL—his second in the past few years.

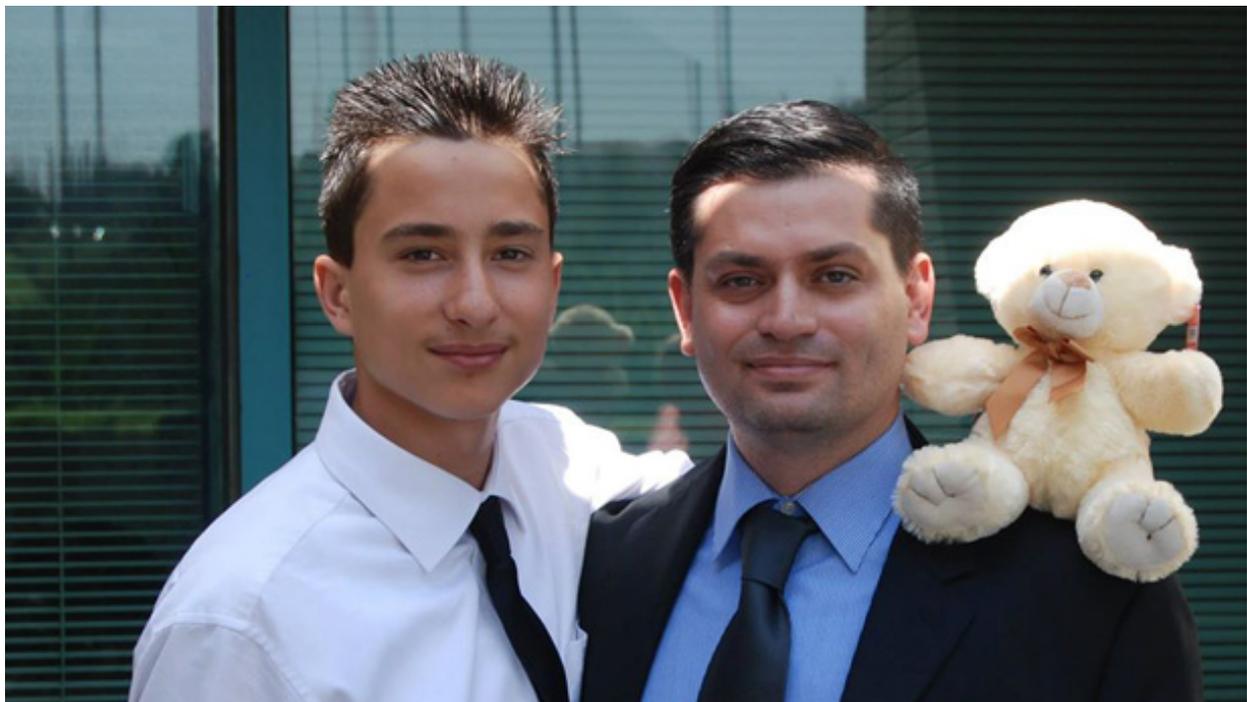
“The really cool thing about living in L.A. is that it’s very progressive, so there are no minimum financial requirements, no age limit, and you can be single,” he says. “The thought is placing kids in a loving, permanent home takes precedence. Nontraditional homes are very much welcome.”

That spring, Sindi arrived at the adoption fair—dozens of children who were wards of the state and available for adoption were present—hoping to connect with a child between the ages of two and five.

Instead, he immediately noticed then-13-year-old Daniel, bright and full of energy.

“All my plans went out the window,” he says. “I have a brother the same age as Daniel, so I knew how to relate to him.”

The two spent time talking. Afterward, Sindi sat down with a social worker to look through an adoption book of all the children present that day. The system is designed to allow both the adults and the kids to have a say in the outcome: Sindi was asked to rank the children he met; he listed Daniel as No. 1. In turn, the children were asked separately about the adults they met and, if it was a match, what they thought of them. Daniel, Sindi was later told, said, “I really liked the NASA guy.”



Oleg Sindi and his son Daniel on adoption day in 2015.

Who Will Step Up?

The numbers can be startling. In Los Angeles County alone, at least 30,000 children are currently in foster care, according to the [Alliance for Children’s Rights](#).

“I believe JPLers have really big hearts and the resources to do something similar if it’s right for them,” he says. “You don’t need to be in a traditional family environment to make a huge difference in a child’s life.”

Indeed, Sindiya has met five foster-to-adopt parents at JPL through word of mouth.

Patrick “P.J.” Guske is one of them. The InSight mission manager sat with Sindiya on the first foster-to-adopt panel at JPL in 2016 and is back this year to share his story.

Guske has three biological children but had long been familiar with adoption. Both of his brothers adopted children privately and through the foster system, and his wife’s aunt and uncle fostered several children and adopted three.

The turning point for Guske and his wife came about nine years ago, when they watched a film their friends made about the need for more churches in America to step up and support the foster system.

“We realized we have the ability, the space, the time and the financial resources—why wouldn’t we?” Guske says. “These children have such great needs. There’s a high emotional toll but we’re not called to be comfortable, so it was important for us to do that.”

The family started the process, and their first placements were two-and-a-half-month-old twins, Henry and Grace; after being neglected by their previous foster parents, they weighed just five pounds each. The Guskes, with the help of their three older children, fed them every two hours around the clock to nurse them back to health. At 22 months, the family formally adopted the twins. But the story wasn’t over.

Less than a year later, the Guskes got a call: A newborn baby had just entered the foster system—could they take care of him also? They said yes, and seven months later, adopted a third child through the system.

While all three children were successfully adopted, Guske stresses that isn’t always the case.

“I want people to have a realistic view. It’s not all baby powder and loving times,” he says, adding that as a foster parent, you have to remember the first priority is reunification of the child with its family. “There are no guarantees that you’ll be able to adopt this child, as much as you would like to. This is not the way to have a guaranteed adoption, but it’s an important need that has to be filled. If not, then who will step up and do it?”

JPLer Roy Gladden has had his own share of trials and tribulations as a foster parent. The Mars Relay Network manager and his wife had three biological children of their own but had trouble conceiving a fourth child. They looked into the foster care system, with the intention of adopting one infant girl. Instead, they took in siblings, both drug-exposed at birth: a 4-year-old boy named Kaleb who had fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and a premature infant girl named Olivia, who was born addicted to meth.

“There was a lot of fear and doubt and uncertainty,” Gladden recalls of the path to adoption. “We weren’t sure if we could keep them or not. We developed a love for the children but we wanted the parents to straighten out. On the one hand, you have total hope and on the other, you have total fear.”

Eventually, “the case sorted itself out,” Gladden says, and he and his wife were able to formally adopt Olivia and Kaleb. Their family of five “was complete,” he says—until they received a phone call a couple of years later from the same adoption agency.

“They told us the biological mother had another child and did we want it?” Gladden recalls. “At that point, we thought we were done with babies. We had even given away all of our baby gear. But we decided to take this baby. [The mother] had drug problems and just never kicked the habit. Now we have her three youngest kids and it’s been a long road, but we’re very happy to have them.”



Roy Gladden with his wife and six children.

Making Room

It's been nearly six years since Sindi and Daniel met for the first time that afternoon in the park. After their match, the visits began slowly, first with dinner at Zeke's Smokehouse in Montrose with a social worker present, and later with one-on-one visits where the two could simply hang out and get to know each other. For the next year or so, they enjoyed a variety of outings, including a trip to the California Science Center to see the Endeavour space shuttle, and a tour of JPL.

On June 2, 2015, Sindi formally adopted Daniel.

"It was a huge adjustment period for the both of us, trying to form a new family," Sindi says. "For me, it was learning how to become a parent to a teenager. For my son, who had entered the system when he was 6 years old, it was learning how to be a child with a parent who was around and had really high expectations."

Those high expectations took shape not only in academics but also in opening his eyes to the world, with Sindi helping Daniel make as many memorable "firsts" as he could.

"Even though my son was already 13 when I met him, because of his background, he didn't have a lot of life experiences," Sindi says. "I got to take him to his first baseball game to see the Dodgers play, and then on his first flight, to San Francisco."

Two other major firsts: Sindi was able to reconnect Daniel with his older brother through social media and also reconnect him with his maternal grandparents.

"Even though they can't provide a permanent home for him, they're involved in his life now," Sindi says.

On June 11, Daniel graduated from Glendale High School with a semester's worth of college credits and a credit union scholarship. He is now studying 3D animation at Glendale Community College and lives independently, sharing a home with friends in Altadena.

“It was bittersweet to have my son move out after only five-and-a-half years, but it’s also really exciting to see him mature into a young man with a whole set of opportunities he didn’t have before,” Sindi says.

As he proudly shares his son’s success story, he hopes his own foster-to-adopt journey can be an inspiring starting point for other JPLers.

“The panel is about sharing the personal experiences of different JPLers who have gone through the process: the good, the bad and the funny.”

Gladden and Guske echo these sentiments, hoping their advice will be both grounding and encouraging for future foster-to-adopt parents.

“These kids are in the foster care system for a reason. They need help, they need love, a home, and somewhere to go,” says Gladden. “Yes, they come with baggage, but no child will ever be perfect. If somebody feels like they have room in their hearts to love another child, they shouldn’t allow fear to stop them. They should make room for a child who through no fault of their own needs help.”

Adds Guske: “It’s the hardest thing we’ve ever done, but we’re rewarded in ways we never thought possible. We can look at these children and honestly say they are amazingly resilient and funny. They bring a totally different aspect to our lives.”



Devil's Gate Dam Update: Hauling Finished for 2019

L.A. County Public Works has finished its first year of sediment removal from Devil's Gate Reservoir, and hauling operations have finished for the 2019 season. Sediment removal and hauling will resume in Spring 2020. You may have noticed construction activities continuing onsite within the reservoir through the end of November, as the contractor removes all of their equipment and prepares the project site for the storm season.

Public Works posted their thanks for the community's support and cooperation, saying it "truly made a difference to help protect residents and businesses downstream from potential flooding this storm season."

Read their full message and learn more about the project on their website at <https://pw.lacounty.gov/swe/devilsgate/>.



(Left) La Canada Valley Beautiful award sign is seen just left of the guard building. (Right) Galen Brown and Debbie Lee accept the award.

Lab's Landscaping Snags La Cañada Award

Through the decades, stellar awards have honored JPL for its cutting-edge, high-tech, pioneering and innovative work -- and now, we have an award celebrating the Lab's attractive greenery. The La Cañada Valley Beautiful organization has presented JPL with a landscaping award in the commercial category.

Next time you pull up to the West Gate, check out the special-award designation sign next to the "Welcome to Our Universe" guard building.

According to Betsy Bazdarich, chair of La Canada Valley Beautiful, properties are judged on what can be seen from the street. Criteria include:

- Landscape design: does the design suit the house and lot?
- Color and texture: the variety of texture and forms of the shrubs and trees, as well as pleasing color combination of flowers and plants.
- Consistent neatness.
- General improvement.
- Unusual features: drought tolerant, special themes, etc.

According to the organization, "The purpose of the awards, both home and commercial, is to encourage our community to continue to look pleasing, and motivate everyone to keep his home/property as an example of how we want the whole community to look."

Bazdarich said recently, "I drove by JPL this morning and found your landscaping outstanding. You have used drought-tolerant plants, the garden reflects a variety of textures and forms with your shrubs, you have added touches of color all around the guard house, and the whole area is neat and well-kept."

Events



When Apollo 12 Visited Surveyor 3 (Rescheduled from November)

Thursday, Dec. 12

2 to 3 p.m.

The Hub - Building 111

Retired JPL employee Justin (Jay) Rennilson will come to the JPL Library to talk about an important space event in US History: when Apollo 12 visited Surveyor 3.

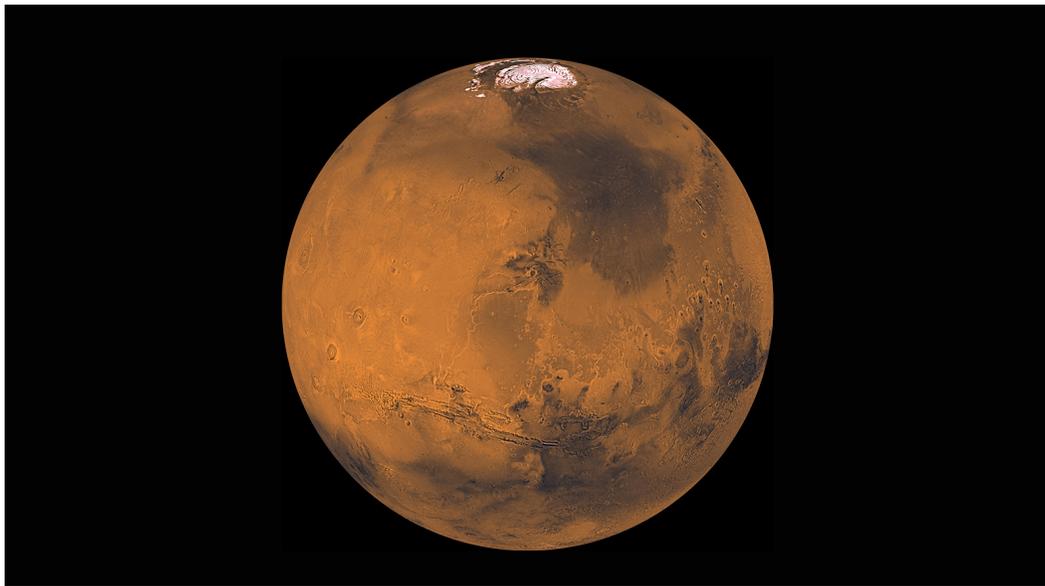
Rennilson writes that 50 years ago, on Nov. 19, 1969, the Apollo 12 crew visited a spacecraft that the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Hughes Aircraft had landed on the moon 2 ½ years earlier. This was the first time anyone from the planet Earth had gone back and visited robotic landers that we earthlings had put on the Moon. In this talk, Rennilson will briefly describe the Surveyor 3 mission that landed on the Moon in the Oceanus Procellarum area in a crater about 200 meters in diameter. When Apollo 12 was planned the site chosen was very close to that of the crater where Surveyor had landed.

There were two main reasons for that choice: One was to prove that Apollo missions could pick a site and then go to exactly where they wanted. The second was to photograph that Surveyor spacecraft, bring back parts and evaluate what the lunar environment had done in 2 ½ years. Rennilson will have a brief summary of what we did to those parts and what we discovered. Stories from both missions and their historic photographs complete the talk.

Speaker Bio:

Justin (Jay) Rennilson is a former JPL employee and Senior Research Fellow at Caltech from 1961 to 1974. Rennilson was involved at the Lab when it was just beginning to expand from 500 employees to 4,000, and trailers and new buildings were being constructed. He was an original co-investigator on the Surveyor Television Experiment and a member of the Lunar Geology Investigative Team on all the Apollo landed missions. He was also involved in the analysis of the returned parts from Apollo 12.

For questions, email the JPL Library at library@jpl.nasa.gov, call us at 818-35 4-4200.



Postponed: 'JPL and the Space Age' Documentary Screenings

The screenings of three documentaries about JPL and the Mars Program (Breaking Point, Mission to Mars, and Landing on Mars), have been postponed. Breaking Point had been scheduled for this week at Caltech's Beckman Auditorium. The events will be rescheduled in early 2020. Get more information and watch for updates on the new dates at:

<https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/events/special-events.php>.



Rachel Ignotofsky: Making Women In Science Visible

Thursday, Dec. 12

11 a.m. to noon

von Karman Auditorium

Join the ACW for a Noontime Seminar with Rachel Ignotofsky, the New York Times bestselling author and illustrator of "Women in Sports," "Women in Science," and "Women in Art," as well as "The Wondrous Workings of Planet Earth."

She has a talent for taking complicated information about science, history and feminism, and making it fun, accessible and exciting for young readers. Ignotofsky spreads her important messages about scientific literacy, representation and craft through talks that appeal to audiences of all ages.

This talk will be followed by a Q&A. For questions and comments, please contact acw@jpl.nasa.gov.



2019 JPL Invention Challenge Involves Ping Pong Balls

Friday, Dec. 13

11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Mall

It has been a yearly tradition at JPL for 22 years: the annual Invention Challenge. It's fun for students, JPL team members, volunteers and spectators.

The title for this year's contest is the "Ping Pong Ball Run Contest." This year's challenge requires teams to create a device that can move up to 10 ping pong balls into a jar located 5 meters away. The winner will be the team that moves the highest number of ping pong balls into the jar.



Cruise Over to the Annual Car Show

Thursday, Dec. 19

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In Front of Building 177

The Facilities and Logistics division will be hosting this year's Annual Car Show on Dec. 19, rain or shine. The show has been a prominent event on Lab dating back to the early 1950s. During the holiday season, this show offers an opportunity to enjoy the comradery while being entertained by the "Shop 300" band and marveling over some of the finest vehicles both past and present. You'll be surprised to see some of the cool wheels your colleagues drive around town!

JPL Family News

Retirees

The following JPL employees recently announced their retirements:

Marcoantonio C. Chavez, Section 386C, 44 years; **Thomas B. Kuiper**, Section 3266, 45 years; **Andrea Ollier**, Section 2811, 10 years; **Stephen D. Wall**, Section 3031, 41 years.