Vesta Fiesta!
August 5-7, 2011

Summer 2011

Dear Dawn Mission Aficionado!

As Principal Investigator of NASA Discovery Program's Dawn mission, I want to thank you for joining our celebration of this marvelous mission milestone: the Dawn spacecraft beginning its up close and personal exploration of Vesta in the main asteroid belt. Vesta Fiestas across the nation and the world promote awareness of our exciting work—a crucial goal of Dawn's Education and Public Outreach efforts.

It has been a long time getting to where we could explore this exciting new world in depth. NASA began funding our project development in 2000, launch was in 2007, with Dawn's arrival at its first destination, Vesta, only now in summer of 2011. Thanks to its ion propulsion system, the Dawn spacecraft will have journeyed more than 2.7 billion kilometers in its spiral trajectory from Earth to Vesta*.

Over the next year, that same ion propulsion system will enable us to move into orbit around Vesta, spiral to low altitude around the protoplanet, then climb out of that low orbit, gathering data again on the way out. Vesta Fiesta is just the first step in keeping abreast of how our talented team of diverse scientists and engineers uncover the thrilling new world of Vesta using Dawn's exciting instrumentation.

Stay tuned by visiting our website regularly for updates: http://dawn.jpl.nasa.gov/. Even better, subscribe to Dawn E-News: http://dawn.jpl.nasa.gov/pressroom/e_news.asp!

Thanks again for your support of Dawn and space science exploration,

Chris Russell

Dr. Chris Russell
Principal Investigator (UCLA)

*The distance from Earth to Vesta is about 250 million km as the space crow flies. Radio signals can travel directly from the spacecraft to Earth, while the spacecraft itself must move to its destinations in an ever-widening orbit around the Sun.