

NATIONAL SPACE SOCIETY TO AWARD DR. ROBERT FERL AND DR. ANNA-LISA PAUL SPACE PIONEER AWARD AT ITS ANNUAL ISDC CONFERENCE

The International Space Development Conference Will Be Held in Orlando in June 2025

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, FL, UNITED STATES, April 17, 2025

/EINPresswire.com/ -- The National Space Society is awarding its 2025 Space Pioneer Award for Scientific Achievement to [University of Florida](#) researchers Robert Ferl and Anna-Lisa Paul for their pioneering work in plant space biology, which was flown by Ferl on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket in August, 2024.



Dr. Paul (to left) and Dr. Ferl at the launch site. Credit: Tyler Jones

The award—which will be presented at the NSS's annual [International Space Development Conference](#) in Orlando, Florida in June—recognizes individuals and teams who have made significant contributions to the development of a “spacefaring civilization that will establish communities beyond the Earth.”

Ferl is a distinguished professor and director of UF's Astraeus Space Institute and is the recipient of NASA's Exceptional Public Service Medal. Paul is a research professor and director of UF's Interdisciplinary Center for Biotechnology Research and received the NASA Medal of Honor for Exceptional Scientific Achievement.

“Robert Ferl and Anna-Lisa Paul were already big names worldwide in the field of plant space biology,” said Dr. Pascal Lee, the NSS VP for Planetary Development, “but their recent human spaceflight experiment, the culmination of years of scientific research and planning, opens big doors for future human space travel and settlement and confirms them as true pioneers of space exploration and settlement.”

Ferl and Paul conducted an experiment during a sub-orbital flight aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard spacecraft on August 29, 2024. Ferl carried experimental plants in specially designed



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Dr. Pascal Lee, NSS VP of Planetary Development

tubes attached to his flight suit that he activated at four different points during the mission: prior to launch, upon reaching microgravity, at the end of the weightless period as the vehicle began its descent, and upon landing. Paul conducted identical control experiments on the ground.

The two researchers have been studying how plants respond to stressful environments for decades, placing their genetically engineered mustard plants on high-flying planes, on the space shuttle, and on the International Space Station. The Blue Origin project is the first time UF has worked directly with a commercial launch provider and

marks an important shift in how universities conduct space-related research.

“This experiment allowed us to explore the underlying mechanisms of how plants cope with the transition from a familiar terrestrial environment to the novel environment of space,” Paul said. “Understanding these mechanisms informs strategies for growing plants in future novel environments, such as in human habitats on the moon or Mars.”

The work has implications on the growing of food for future space efforts, including long-duration transits—such as from Earth to Mars—and for permanent settlements off-Earth.

The International Space Development Conference® (ISDC®) is one of the largest and longest-running space conferences in the world and is now in its 43rd year. [Other featured speakers](#) include astronauts Jared Isaacman, Chris Ferguson, Robert “Hoot” Gibson, Susan Kilrain, and Dr. Sian Proctor, as well as techno-visionary Dr. Martine Rothblatt, former NASA Chief Scientist Dr. Jim Green, NASA Associate Administrator Dr. Nicola Fox, SETI Institute and NASA Ames planetary scientist Dr. Pascal Lee, Space.com Editor-in-Chief Tariq Malik, and Ad Astra magazine Editor-in-Chief Rod Pyle.

For more information on the ISDC, see the conference website at isdcspace.org.

ABOUT THE NSS

The National Space Society is the preeminent non-partisan citizens’ voice on space exploration, development, and settlement, reaching millions through its membership, numerous outreach channels, and media activities. The organization was founded in 1987 via a merger of the National Space Institute and the L5 Society. To learn more about the NSS and its mission to establish humanity as a spacefaring species, visit us on the web at nss.org.

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