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Published November 11th, 2009

Science Cafe-Searching for ET

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"Space, the final frontier...to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." These are the memorable words of a Hollywood-based space explorer, a.k.a. William Shatner. The crew of the Starship Enterprise made the search for new life look easy.

In today's "real" world, the search for extraterrestrial life involves much more than rocket science and special film effects. Where we look for life and what we do when we find it are questions that challenge the space mission planners and astrobiologists who are charged with protecting the planets during space exploration. This topic and much more will be covered by Dr. Margaret Race in her upcoming presentation, Searching for ET.

Race, a scientist and researcher at the SETI Institute where she conducts research with NASA's Office of Planetary Protection, will lead an interactive presentation on the advance planning needed for space missions, like the Mars Sample Return missions, and the societal implications of space exploration. "What happens if we find life out there as we don't know it?" asks Race, who works with ethicists, theologians, lawyers, philosophers, along with scientists in her quest to find answers to the many questions related to the societal implications of space exploration.

Race's presentation will be the sixth Science Cafe sponsored by the American Chemical Society and held in Orinda over the past two years. Science Cafes are informal presentations on a current science topic that typically take place in casual settings such as a restaurant or coffeehouse. Structured as a face-to-face conversation with a scientific expert, attendees are encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussion.

The first Science Cafe held in Orinda in 2007 covered the chemistry of chocolate and drew over 100 people. "The local chapter of the American Chemical Society would like to make Science Cafes a regular program for the Lamorinda area," says Orinda resident and the event organizer Marinda Wu, a retired scientist and current member of the Board of Directors for the National American Chemical Society.

The Science Cafe is a free, family-friendly event. "It's the kids of today who will deal with the impacts of space exploration," says Race, who notes that her current job did not exist when she was a student. The event will be held on Monday, November 16th at Pizzeria Amoroma in Orinda. The presentation will start at 7:00 p.m., and attendees are encouraged to arrive before 7:00 to purchase food and get settled.

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