

AURA and Gemini Observatory Announce New Director

Dr. Douglas A. Simons has been appointed the next director of the Gemini Observatory effective June 1, 2006. The announcement was made today by Dr. William Smith, President of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA). AURA manages the Gemini Observatory under contract with the National Science Foundation on behalf of the partner countries United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Brazil and Argentina.

"I am thrilled that Doug will continue to move Gemini forward to become the leading ground-based astronomical observatory with this appointment," said AURA President Dr. Bill Smith. Dr. Michael Shull, Chair of the AURA Board, said "Doug's knowledge and his leadership in the development of Gemini's current and future instrumentation bode well for the observatory's future. I am confident that the Gemini partners will benefit greatly from this appointment."

Dr. Simons is preceded by Professor Jean-René Roy who has been the acting director after Gemini's former director of almost 11 years, Dr. Matt Mountain, took the directorship at the Hubble Space Telescope Science Institute on September 1st 2005.

Dr. Simons obtained a Ph. D. in astronomy from the University of Hawaii's Institute for Astronomy in Honolulu in 1994. He then joined the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope Corporation (CFHT) on the Big Island as resident astronomer. In 1994, he came to the Gemini Observatory where he has served as Gemini's Associate Director for Development, overseeing the observatory's world-class instrument program. Dr. Simons played a leading role in steering the "Aspen Process" that defined the future generation of Gemini instruments and in implementing this ambitious instrumentation program.

"It's an enormous pleasure, after participating in the construction of the Gemini 8 m telescopes, to now guide the Gemini Observatory into its next great phase – a mission of scientific discovery. Steering the flag-ship of the fleet in ground based infrared astronomy is truly the opportunity of a lifetime," said Simons

In addition to Doug's professional background in astronomy (infrared studies of brown dwarfs and the Galactic center) and infrared instrumentation, his young family (his wife Judy and 3 children, Kristie, Chris and Jacob), extensive fine woodworking projects and bird hunting augment his days that typically begin well before sunrise. "Doug is strongly committed to the observatory, its multinational partnership and its user community. He is almost always the first person in the office in the morning. He is definitely not your typical astronomer – but he is one of the best I've ever worked with," said Professor Roy.

"It is hard to imagine anyone better qualified to lead the observatory and its new Aspen instrument program to the forefront of astronomical research," said Dr.

Mountain. "I personally look forward to many years of exciting science results, perhaps even combining Gemini, HST and JWST observations!"