

# newsletter

NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN LOW GRAVITY RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



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## President's page

Dear ELGRA members,

Please find before you the 7th ELGRA Biennial NewsLetter which now carries its own ISSN. Since the last issue from the end of 2009 the landscape for microgravity-related science has changes quite significantly. At that time the main European contribution to the research capacity of the International Space Station, the Columbus module, was just fully operational. Since then, quite some experiments have been performed in Columbus and other modules. However, some challenging times are ahead. The Space Shuttle will be decommissioned soon. This leaves the science community with a serious reduction in download capacity. All sciences will suffer from this situation; in particular those studies where ground-based analysis has a major share. ESA and others try to relieve this burden by developing on-board analysis instruments, but surely these cannot replace the research capacities and capabilities available in ground laboratories. A solution to this limitation needs be found soon. At the same time, new American space companies are developing modules that could be used to return our samples. I hope European scientists are provided means to make use of these or other download capacities.

You will soon receive the printed publications from the last ELGRA Symposium in Bonn (Germany). Most papers are already online. This thematic edition of Microgravity Science and Technology (MST) very well reflects the current status of our present research. As ELGRA we are pleased to have established firm relations with MST and its publisher Springer. We are investigating the possibility to have MST as a regular journal for all ELGRA members.

Please note that ELGRA organizes its next Biennial Symposium – the 21st since its foundation – during September 6–9, 2009 in Antwerp, Belgium. Profs. Floris Wuyts and Valentina Shevtsova, from the University Antwerp and the Free University of Brussels, respectively, will be our local organizers.

I also want to thank the ELGRA members for their support by assisting young researchers on their path to gravity-related research through the ELGRA Mentorships. For the past years ELGRA has been active to support the ESA educational programs Fly-Your-Thesis (FYT), Spin-Your-Thesis (SYT) and Drop-Your-Thesis (DYT).

It is very encouraging to see such an enthusiastic interest of the young generation for our field.

As for previous ELGRA symposia we expect large student participation in our next Symposium and we shall do our best to support their venue. In addition, we shall organize a contest for the best student studies in both Physical and Life Sciences, as we did previously. The winners, in addition to receiving the ELGRA Award, will present their work to the plenum during a general session. Our Symposium gives us the opportunity to award the ELGRA Medals. Every two years, ELGRA honors two scientists in Life and Physical Sciences for their outstanding contribution to Microgravity Research. It is also the occasion at which the new management committee of ELGRA will be elected during the General Assembly. I would like to sincerely invite volunteers interested in serving our Association to contact me directly. At the next General Assembly the management committee will face a significant renewal. At least, a new president and a new vice-president need to be elected.

ELGRA is an active organization and supports a number of national and international scientific meetings such as the joint meetings with ESA or with the International Society for Gravitational Physiology (ISGP). As ELGRA we are looking into the possibility to organize even further joint conferences.

The near future will bring some major changes regarding gravity-related research in Europe. I sincerely hope that the various national programs, ESA through its ELIPS program, but also the European Union through its EC-SPACE/FP-8 will provide suitable opportunities for the user community to carry out excellent science. With the prospect of extending the lifetime of the ISS to 2020 (and perhaps 2026) a bright future seems to be ahead, although we Europeans should also keep in mind non-ISS microgravity platforms, not only for the after-ISS era.

I wish you an excellent year 2011 and look forward to welcoming you all in Antwerp to make our next Symposium a great success!

Jack van Loon  
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