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**Rob Navias to receive RNASA’s 2017 Space Communicator Award**

**HOUSTON, Texas** (February 6, 2017). The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation has selected Rob Navias, Johnson Space Center Public Affairs Office (PAO) Mission Commentator and lead for the Program and Television Operations, to receive the prestigious 2017 Space Communicator Award.

Long known as the iconic voice of Mission Control, Navias covered every shuttle mission from the maiden launch of Columbia in April 1981 to Atlantis’ final voyage in July 2011, either as a member of the news media or as a NASA employee.

Colonel Chris Hadfield, former Canadian Space Agency Astronaut, who nominated Navias said, “Rob IS the voice of NASA – authoritative, prepared, distinctive, calm and stylish. He has brought space flight to the world for over 25 years.”

Navias started as a network broadcast radio correspondent in 1972 based in San Francisco with the Associated Press Radio Network. It was there that he got his first taste of the space beat when he reported on the voyage of Pioneer 11, a robotic space probe that studied the asteroid belt and the rings of Saturn. In 1977, he covered the test flights for the space shuttle Enterprise at Edwards Air Force Base in California. While in San Francisco with AP, Navias also covered such stories as the Patricia Hearst kidnapping and trial from 1974-1976, and the People’s Temple mass suicides in Guyana and the City Hall assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978, as well as the Voyager missions from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif.

He moved on to the United Press International (UPI) Radio Network in 1982 where he served as a Capitol Hill correspondent in Washington D.C. while continuing to cover all space shuttle missions at the Kennedy Space Center. Over the next ten years with UPI he crisscrossed the country to cover high profile stories such as the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles and Hurricane Andrew in Miami. Navias was at the Kennedy Space Center on the air when the Challenger tragically exploded 73 seconds after liftoff in 1986. He concluded his media career in 1992 as a correspondent for the CBS Radio Network based in Miami, all the while continuing his coverage of NASA and the space shuttle program.

His career with NASA began in 1993. He was recruited to work in the Office of Public Affairs at the Johnson Space Center where he not only managed the flow of information via radio and TV but he did so with unmatched clarity.

In addition to coverage of the space shuttle, Navias has been the lead for Public Affairs operations involving Russian launch and landing operations of U.S. astronauts and international partner crewmembers for the past two decades. Having spent considerable time in Moscow and in Kazakhstan, Navias has been to the launch site in Baikonur, Kazakhstan for Soyuz and other International Space Station element launches and preparatory meetings over a hundred times and has ridden Russian military helicopters to Soyuz landing sites in Kazakhstan dozens of times to recover space station crewmembers.

Hadfield wrote, “Rob has spent countless hours studying and preparing for dozens of shuttle launches, landings, space walks, and in flight interviews so he can then properly report to his listeners. His iconic voice has offered informed, well-researched facts for decades. Known for his eloquent style, Navias was often the lead commentator for shuttle missions but it was Atlantis’ final mission in 2011 that was particularly poignant. Upon Atlantis’ landing Navias said: “having fired the imagination of a generation, a ship like no other, its place in history secured, the Space Shuttle pulls into port for the last time – its voyage at an end.”

When asked to reflect on his career and what spurred his interest in space, Navias recounts receiving a transistor radio from his father in in 1961. Using that radio, he listened intently when Yuri Gagarin was the first person to be launched into space and again when Alan Shepard flew aboard Freedom 7. The space program had hooked another young American!

Navias said of his award, “This is an enormous honor, not only to be nominated by those who forged a part of the history of human spaceflight, but to represent a communications industry whose solemn obligation is to report the news, educate the media and the public and to share the wonderment of humankind’s most incredible journey.”

The RNASA Space Communicator Award was created in 1997 in honor of KTRK, Houston Channel 13 space reporter and long-time RNASA Advisor Stephen Gauvain who was tragically killed in a car accident in 1996. The award is presented to an individual or team that makes exceptional contributions to public understanding and appreciation of space exploration The previous recipients of the award are: William Harwood of CBS; Miles O'Brien, formerly of CNN; Elliot Pulham of the Space Foundation; the NASA-Contractor Communications team that responded to the Columbia accident; Mark Carreau, formerly of the Houston Chronicle; Neil deGrasse Tyson of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, Veronica McGregor, Manager of News and Social Media at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, former [Canadian Space Agency astronaut, author, and musician Chris A. Hadfield](http://www.asc-csa.gc.ca/eng/missions/expedition34-35/profile.asp), and Bill Nye (the science guy) CEO of the Planetary Society.

Navias will be honored with the 2017 Space Communicator Award at RNASA’s 31st annual National Space Trophy Banquet on April 28, 2017, at the Houston Hyatt Regency. Dr. John M. Grunsfeld, former Associate Administrator of the Science Mission Directorate at NASA Headquarters in Washington D.C., will receive the 2017 National Space Trophy.

The RNASA Foundation invites members of the public and the aerospace community to attend the black-tie event on April 28, 2017, at the Houston Hyatt Regency. Please visit **http://www.rnasa.org/tables.html** to reserve your table for the RNASA Banquet and find information about sponsorships and tickets. To reserve a room at the Houston Hyatt Regency, please visit **http://www.rnasa.org/houston.html** or call 713-654-1234 and request the RNASA group rate. The RNASA website is [**http://www.rnasa.org/**](http://www.rnasa.org/)**.**

*About RNASA: The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation was founded by the Space Center Rotary Club of Houston, Texas in 1985 to organize and coordinate an annual event to recognize outstanding achievements in space and create greater public awareness of the benefits of space exploration. The nonprofit Foundation presents the National Space Trophy and Stellar Awards each year.*