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Scientist wins prize for solving mysteries of the universe

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Professor Robert Kennicutt, Director of the Institute of Astronomy, is one of three recipients of this year's Gruber Cosmology Prize which



recognises his work in determining the age of the Universe, around 14 billion years old.

Sharing the prize with astronomers Wendy Freedman and Jeremy Mould, his work for 10 painstaking years has helped to resolve the decades-long dispute about the value of the Hubble constant, one of the most important measurements in astronomy. Together, they led the Hubble Space Telescope Key Project on the Extragalactic Distance Scale, one of the three major projects of the Hubble Space Telescope when it was launched in 1990. Working with a team of more than two dozen astronomers at 13 different institutions around the world, Freedman, Kennicutt and Mould determined the value of the Hubble constant to unprecedented accuracy. Their finding, which was published in 2001, means the universe is some 14 billion years old-which agrees with the age estimates for the oldest stars.

The project has not only determined the age of the universe, but also enabled scientists to carry out more accurate investigations into the birth, evolution and composition of the universe.

"The Hubble constant ties time and space together," says Professor Ron Ekers, past President of the International Astronomical union.

"As soon as Hubble saw that the universe was expanding, astronomers recognized that this

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number was the key to understanding the universe's history. It is most appropriate that in the International Year of Astronomy the Gruber Foundation has awarded the Cosmology prize to the team that has made the definitive measurement of the Hubble constant. Galileo's observations answered the question of where we are in the universe - these Hubble Space Telescope observations answer mankind's quest to know how big and how old it is."

Freedman, Kennicutt, and Mould will receive the Prize on August 4, 2009, at the opening ceremony of the International Astronomical Union's General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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