

Lab celebrates 50 years in space

December 1, 2013



Not only does 2013 mark the Lab's 70th anniversary, it also marks the 50th anniversary of its first mission into space. During those five decades, it's been involved in 206 launches—only a few other organizations in the world can claim more—that began with the goal of helping monitor compliance with the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty through satellite observation.

Over the years, the Lab's instruments have not only helped detect possible nuclear weapon detonations, they've also led to fundamental scientific discoveries including heavy ions, gamma-ray and x-ray bursts and the plasma sheet. It has also been involved in all aspects of the satellites, from design through data analysis. In addition, it's working to keep the more than [16,000 objects currently orbiting the Earth from crashing into each other](#).

It was the [Vela satellites](#) that began the Lab's work in this area, and over time it developed the expertise it uses today to not only monitor treaty compliance here on Earth but advance our understanding of the universe even further. As you read this, NASA's [IBEX](#) (short for Interstellar Boundary Explorer) satellite, which includes the

Lab's High-Energy Neutral Atom imager, is collecting data about the particles contained in the "protective bubble" in which our solar system lies, called the heliosphere.

In celebration of the Lab's history, planning is underway for a Rocketfest 2014 event to take place at Overlook Park in White Rock. Currently scheduled to coincide with the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta next year, the plans include shooting 206 rockets—to represent the launches the Lab's undertaken so far—and other interstellar activities.

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