

NEWS RELEASE

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Deep Sea Explorer & Marine Conservationist Wins MacArthur Fellowship

(Fort Pierce, Florida, September 19, 2006) – Dr. Edith Widder, President & Senior Scientist of the Ocean Research & Conservation Association, has been named a MacArthur Fellow for 2006. She will receive \$500,000 in “no strings attached” support over the next five years under the terms of the award from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The foundation’s criteria for the awards, popularly known as “genius grants” include exceptional originality, creativity and capacity to contribute importantly to society based on a track record of significant accomplishment. Dr. Widder was selected for her work combining “expertise in oceanographic research and technological innovation with a commitment to reversing the worldwide trend of marine ecosystem degradation.” Her work was highlighted for “fostering a greater understanding of ocean life as a means to better, more informed ocean stewardship.”

“Everyone focuses on the money,” said Dr. Widder, “But what thrills me is the MacArthur Foundation’s focus on helping us find critically needed solutions to some of the most pressing conservation challenges facing our ocean.” Keith Paglen, Chief Executive Officer of the Ocean Research & Conservation Association said, “Everyone here is thrilled for Dr. Widder. Without a healthy ocean we cannot have a healthy planet, but with proper guidance from scientists—dare I say geniuses--like Dr. Widder and support from the public we can have both.”

Dr. Widder joins 25 other recipients of the award this year in fields as diverse as music and medicine. “This new group of MacArthur Fellows illustrates our conviction that talented and creative individuals, free to follow their insights and instincts, will reveal new discoveries and make a difference in shaping our future,” said Jonathan Fanton, President of the MacArthur Foundation. “There is something palpable about this group of MacArthur Fellows—about their character as explorers and pioneers at the absolute cutting edge. These are people pushing boldly to change, improve, and protect our world, to make it a better place for all of us,” said Daniel J. Socolow, Director of the MacArthur Fellows Program.

According to Bruce H. Robison, Senior Scientist, Monterrey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, “Dr. Widder’s scientific track record is outstanding with significant technological developments to her credit and a genuine commitment to advancing the field.” Charles S. Yentsch, Founder and Senior Research Scientist of Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences in West Boothbay Harbor, Maine said, “Her high tech approach to sampling and analysis is an extremely efficient way of collecting data vs. traditional and costly methods of hand sampling.”

A specialist in bioluminescence (the light chemically produced by many ocean organisms), she has been a leader in helping to design and invent new instrumentation and equipment to enable unobtrusive deep-sea observation of environments. Working with engineers, she has built a number of unique devices that enable scientists to see the ocean in new ways, including HINDEX, a bathyphotometer that measures how much bioluminescence there is in the oceans and LoLAR, a very sensitive deep-sea light meter. Most recently, Widder helped to design a remotely operated camera system, known as the Eye in the Sea (EITS) which, when deployed on the sea floor, automatically detects and measures the bioluminescence given off by nearby organisms and records behaviors unobtrusively using far red light that is invisible to most deep-sea dwellers. EITS has produced footage of rare sharks and jellyfish as well as a six foot squid never before known to science.

With support from the National Science Foundation and the Office of Naval Research the Ocean Research & Conservation Association is developing high tech sensors and communication systems capable of evaluating the presence of certain plants, animals and environmental factors important in monitoring water quality. Such systems will report back to scientists and resource managers so better management solutions can be implemented against threats to healthy marine ecosystems. The Ocean Research & Conservation Association will soon launch a nationwide public outreach effort aimed at raising funds and public awareness for this important effort. "What Dr. Widder is proposing has profound implications," said collaborator Dr. Eric D. Thosteson, Professor of Marine and Environmental Systems at Florida Institute of Technology, "Marine ecosystems can truly benefit from the type of work Dr. Widder specializes in."

About the Ocean Research & Conservation Association

The Ocean Research & Conservation Association is a 501(C)(3) not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the study and protection of marine ecosystems and the species they sustain through the development of innovative technologies, science based conservation action and public education. These endeavors are pursued under the highest possible commitment to scientific integrity, while following best practices of corporate governance in a spirit of service to the nations we work in and the future generations of people who will live there. The organization operates from its Duerr Laboratory for Marine Conservation housed in the historic Fort Pierce Inlet coast guard station, operated by the Indian River Community College.

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