YURI'S NIGHT GETS CURIOUS – DREAMING, EXPLORING, AND CELEBRATING. Stephanie Finnvik1
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Introduction: Yuri’s Night is a global celebration of humanity’s past, present, and future in space; events are held around the world every April in commemoration and celebration of April 12, 1961, the day of both the first human spaceflight, that of Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, and the inaugural launch of NASA’s Space Shuttle, exactly twenty years later [1].

After another twenty years, a new space milestone was achieved in 2001 by connecting thousands of people around the world to honor and celebrate the past and present, and foster excitement for the future. That event was Yuri’s Night, the World Space Party. People around the world have gathered each year on April 12th at these events to dream about where we are going, exploring where we are, and celebrating our space-flight heritage. Yuri’s Night events vary from large parties at NASA centers, to educational events, to star parties, to simple backyard barbecues. It is an opportunity to celebrate, share, and explore the wonders of our cosmos for all ages in many ways.

Recent Years: In 2011, marking the 50th anniversary of human spaceflight, 567 officially-recognized Yuri’s Night events were held in 75 countries on all 7 continents plus a toast on the International Space Station. With the growth and success of Yuri’s Night since 2001, we have increased our reach and audience to encompass not just space enthusiasts, but everyone on the planet.

In the past, Yuri’s Night partner organization Spacevidcast has hosted a Global Webcast featuring an interactive live feed from events across the world as well as interviews with prominent space personalities. The Global Webcast has reached hundreds of thousands of people to foster a sense of cohesion and connectedness between thousands of events around the world [2, 3].

Getting Curious: 2012 saw a surge in mainstream public interest for human spaceflight (HSF), some highlights include: Felix Baumgartner’s altitude record breaking jump from the upper stratosphere; SpaceX’s Dragon successfully berthing to the ISS twice; China’s first female Taikonaut and docking in space; Angry Birds™ Space and Angry Birds™ Star Wars®; and Voyager 1 leaving the solar system.

Perhaps most highlighted of the events in 2012, the Mars Science Laboratory (Curiosity) successfully landed in Gale Crater. This event sparked a new interest of and attention to space endeavors for many. Through the GetCurious campaign, Yuri’s Night teamed with Explore Mars to celebrate the landing of Curiosity with landing parties around the world on August 5th, the landing date for the MSL. The GetCurious project was a collaboration between Explore Mars, Yuri’s Night, National Geographic Society, Aerojet, United Launch Alliance, National Institute of Aerospace, and Phillips & Company, and was aimed to bring public awareness of spaceflight to the masses.

For Yuri’s Night, our goal in joining the GetCurious project was to expand our audience and reach around the world, leveraging a pre-existing marketing campaign to engage with new partners and expand beyond our current focus of HSF and share in the enthusiasm toward planetary sciences and the greater space science community. We achieved this goal to a higher degree than expected. On August 5th, 2012, over 25,400 people participated in over 60 recognized events around the world from the U.S. to Tokyo to the South Pole. To the Yuri’s Night Global Executive Team, the crowning moment was seeing virtually all the pedestrians in Times Square sitting on the pavement watching on a jumbotron as Curiosity ploughed through the Martian atmosphere.

Looking Ahead: Moving forward, we hope to further collaborate with new partners and leverage new missions, concepts, and ideas in education and public outreach and to engage more people around the world in the celebration and excitement of spaceflight. Yuri’s Night plans to continue our mission of bridging cultures and building communities around the world.

References: