

Astrobiology Night at the Ballpark – Science Outreach to Non-traditional Audiences. B.A. Norsted, University of Wisconsin Geology Museum (1215 W. Dayton Street, Madison, WI 53711 brooke@geology.wisc.edu)

**Introduction:** Science outreach often targets audiences that are already interested in science and are looking for related educational experiences for themselves or their families. The University of Wisconsin Geology Museum (UWGM) with funding from the NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI) is targeting unique venues and thereby new audiences who may not typically seek out science outreach events. With this goal in mind, in June, 2009 the UWGM and NAI sponsored an “Astrobiology Night at the Ballpark” at the Madison Mallards Ballpark, the local Madison, Wisconsin minor league baseball venue.

At the game, 6,250 attendees were exposed to current NASA-funded astrobiology research being conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Fans were greeted at the gate by volunteers passing out a nine-card pack of extremophile trading cards, each of which featured a different extremophile group (e.g. halophiles, cryophiles, barophiles). Next, participants could interact with project scientists, graduate students and museum staff at four exploration stations, where each station highlighted astrobiology themes (i.e. extremophiles, banded iron formation, earth’s oldest rocks, earth’s oldest fossils). Before the game began, the video board on the field was used to broadcast short NASA videos about recent Mars missions as well as the search for life in space. Additionally, inning breaks were used as fun opportunities to engage fans through an “Alien vs. Kids” tug-of-war as well as the distribution of Frisbees with an astrobiology timeline printed on them.

Engaging the broader public at a non-science venue is a means to breaking down perceived barriers between scientists and the general public. We found Mallards fans to be receptive and ready to connect with our science themes. Tapping into a new audience also builds a larger awareness of our museum and University, expanding our impact in the community.