

## *Mark Mulrooney – 2000's*

*In the biographical style of famed Dave Barry award recipient Duane Pontius, Mark Mulrooney is honored to be nominated for Outstanding SPAC Alumni of the 2000's. It is not without a modicum of irony that the post-millennial decade denotes Dr. Mulrooney's nomination, as it is only because it took him 13 yrs to finish his Ph.D. that he is not recognized among the illustrious graduates of his own entering class of 1987- but rather is in competition with SPAC graduates whom he has never met nor were likely matriculated in junior high school when he entered graduate school. But being such an old late bloomer has many advantages – and one of them shining - for he knows and remembers what it means to be part of SPAC:*

*That we trace our lineage to towering figures that gathered in 1963 and forged henceforth, amongst the unbridled optimism of that finest American decade, an institution that has since educated generations of scientists and thereby inexorably altered the rate and course of our understanding of the natural world. We are the beneficiaries and trustees of that SPAC heritage and each of us is an element in its ascendancy ...we must always be cognizant whence we came.*

*Now back to earth:*

*Despite Dr. Mulrooney's truancy he did finish under the wire due to a generous mixture of encouragement and irritation from Reggie Dufour, Pat Reiff, Jon Weisheit, Umbe Cantu, and Maria Byrne – and to all of whom he is, and forever will be, eternally grateful. The delay notwithstanding he has endeavored to do justice to the time and effort expended by his professors [turned colleagues] as they labored to formally educate him...instilling in him the acuity and rigor of thought and reason that tempers the essential but impetuous creative spark that ultimately renders the new and wondrous things under the sun.*

*Coupling a SPAC academic upbringing with an extended period of inexplicable good luck and a persistent serendipity that brought a host of [less than] once in a life time opportunities, Dr. Mulrooney while making a career at the NASA Johnson Space Center was given the opportunity to help make one of those wondrous new things that the sun would grace [if only metaphorically lest the moon be slighted] - the NASA 3 meter Liquid Mirror Telescope(LMT) – which, at the time (1994-2002), was the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest telescope, and, more importantly (apart from earning him a Ph.D.), proved LMTs not a novelty, but rather a cost effective means of performing hard core astronomy and orbital debris detection on a shoestring. Determining redshifts spectro-photometrically the NASA-LMT extended the famed deLapparent large scale structure survey (think "straw man") by an order of magnitude in Z. On the orbital debris front it statistically sampled the optical population at sizes an order of magnitude smaller (1 cm diameter) than any prior instrument. This was ground-breaking stuff in its day. From Sky and Telescope to Smithsonian to ApJ the LMT made news. It was a great time in the nominee's life, a pinnacle of noble discovery at NASA, and a project in step with and made possible by that venerable SPAC.*

*All else since has been productive but anti-climactic. Lots of phase function and albedo papers, some of them cutting edge paradigm shifting stuff, and a few more telescope projects along the way. The good doctor even saved the Shuttle Program tens of millions of dollars and heaps of embarrassment by thwarting an ill conceived window reinforcement effort that would have rendered the canopy windows useless for photographic imaging. But in life there are usually no great second acts and that may oft be true of a scientific career as well. You get smarter and more seasoned, but perhaps serendipity only strikes once with a vengeance. In Mulrooney's case he's just damn thankful he had the fortitude and the SPAC education to make a decent go of it when called to serve that muse.*

*PS: He's also very jealous of Pontius' 10K(+) sea miles, as Mulrooney has a large sailboat but rarely goes anywhere. And he thanks PK for giving him a collegial forum to voice his musings....*