



Courtesy Don Figer

## Don Figer

Director of the Rochester Imaging Detector Laboratory (RIDL) and professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in New York

- 8 A.M.** Watch daughter board the school bus, and then get in my own school "bus" to go to RIT.
- 9 A.M.** Prepare lecture for undergraduate Detectors course.
- 10 A.M.** Meet with students during office hours.
- 11 A.M.** Finish paper describing the discovery of a massive star cluster in the Milky Way.
- Noon** Have lunch on campus with RIDL co-workers.
- 1 P.M.** Write data reduction and analysis software for the NASA-funded low-noise detector project in the RIDL. This \$1.7 million project will develop a new generation of low-noise detectors for astrophysics and planetary space missions.
- 2 P.M.** Write first draft of proposal for funds to create the National Center for Imaging Detectors.
- 3 P.M.** Attend weekly RIT Massive Star research group meeting.
- 4 P.M.** Meet in RIDL to discuss single-photon imaging detector project for the Thirty Meter Telescope, funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. This \$2.8 million project will develop a new detector that will quadruple the power of a telescope for detecting the faintest objects in the universe.
- 6 P.M.** Have dinner with family and recount favorite things that happened today.
- 7 P.M.** Tuck girls into bed.
- 8 P.M.** Review draft papers from astronomers in the Massive Star research group.
- 9 P.M.** Review NASA research proposals and referee paper for *The Astrophysical Journal*.
- 11 P.M.** Count my lucky stars until I fall asleep!

## OUR TURN

# Andrea Dupree

Senior astrophysicist at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts

### Why did you choose astronomy for a career?

My choice of astronomy was truly accidental. My liberal arts college, Wellesley College, required that every student take a laboratory science course.

To me, college was the time to try out new fields. Looking through the Wellesley College course catalog, I found only two unfamiliar laboratory science subjects that fulfilled the laboratory requirement: astronomy and geology.

So the summer before my freshman year, I flipped a coin to make the choice — and it came up astronomy. At Wellesley, I discovered that astronomy is a "practical" combination of both physics and math applied to the universe — and I loved it!

### What's going on in your research of cool stars?

Cool-star research is now bubbling with new ideas. This includes discoveries of planets — sometimes many planets — around cool stars.

These systems are vastly different from our solar system and stretch our concepts of systems of stars and planets. How did the stars form? Where and when did the planets form? How did their sizes and arrangements come to be? How does the stellar history affect the planets? How do the planets affect their host stars? All of these questions impact our understanding of Earth's history, including the evolution of life on it.

### What was a challenge you faced in your career, and how did you respond?

In the late 1970s, issues of salary inequality began to emerge in scientific communities. I discov-

ered that my salary was substantially less than a male colleague of about the same status. Before bringing this inequity up with my supervisor, I gathered data. How many papers had he published? How many talks had he given? I clearly had more accomplishments than my colleague. So why was my salary 30 percent lower?

I went to see my supervisor and showed him what I had found. He smiled kindly and offered an explanation: I had a husband to support me, so I did not need the money. Obviously, not a satisfactory answer. So I went to see the Division Director, who found my comparison interesting and said he would be happy to look into this the following year when the annual salary reviews were scheduled.

A year is a long time for inequities, so I spoke with the Observatory Director. He reviewed the situation and increased my salary immediately. In this case, factual evidence coupled with persistence led to a satisfactory conclusion.



Images courtesy Andrea Dupree



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