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Arkansas Native Dr. Ruth Jones Awarded Federal Employees' 'Wings of Excellence' for Contributions to NASA

Dr. Ruth Jones, a native of West Helena, Ark., and an alumna of the University of Arkansas in Pine Bluff, recently won a prestigious award for federal employees for work performed at two different NASA centers.

The Cleveland Federal Executive Board honored Jones with the Wings of Excellence award at a May 10 ceremony. The board assists federal agencies and their employees in the Cleveland area by providing information, leadership, community outreach and emergency response when needed. The award recognizes federal employees, nominated by their agency, for their demonstration of excellence and commitment to public service and as an example of leadership.

Jones is a mishap investigation specialist with the NASA Safety Center Mishap Investigation Support Center based out of NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, but she resides at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala., as a remote employee. The NASA Safety Office focuses on improving the development of personnel, processes and tools needed for the safe and successful achievement of NASA's strategic goals and missions. In 2012, she assisted in three investigations requiring rapid intervention and assistance, including an asbestos exposure mishap at Glenn. Her participation in the Glenn investigation required her to serve extended temporary duty there to successfully complete the investigation within the 75-day requirement.

"Dr. Jones works effectively with center personnel and provides significant contributions to the agency's investigation process," said Alan Phillips, director of the NASA Safety Center. "She is a great employee for NASA and also is very active in mentoring youth and young women in the community. Her disposition and attitude are a blessing to all who interact with her and I was proud to nominate her for this award."

Jones' NASA career began as an undergraduate student at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, or UAPB. She interned at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., her junior year and joined the Marshall Center after becoming the first woman to earn a bachelor's degree in physics from UAPB in 1994. She was a co-op student at Marshall while completing her graduate studies, earning her master's degree in physics/materials science in 1997 and her doctorate in 2000, both from Alabama A&M University in Huntsville. She was only the second African-American to receive a

doctorate in physics in the state of Alabama.

Jones is an active mentor in the Youth Motivation Task Force at UAPB and Alabama A&M. This group seeks to inspire, motivate, empower and encourage young people as they transition from academics to a professional and business environment.

"While I mentor several young women and try to be a positive influence on our future leaders and scientists, working for NASA has always been a dream of mine," Jones said. "So, I am very honored to be recognized for both my work performance as well as the assistance I feel called to give to these young professionals."

Her co-workers second the sentiments expressed by the award.

"Ruth is such a pleasure to work with and is a key member of our team," said Ken O'Connor, manager of the Mishap Investigation Support Office. "She is sincere and always looks forward to helping and contributing. Her compassion and efforts to reach out to youth set a great example for all of us."

Jones has earned a number of awards during her tenure with NASA, including a Marshall Center Director's Commendation in 2003 and a Glenn Research Center Director's Commendation in 2011. She also has published several articles on optical physics.

Jones is a native of West Helena, Ark., where her parents, William and Essie, still live. She currently resides in Huntsville.

