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Scientist's fans push for stamp

By Krisy Gashler
Journal Staff

Supporters of the late Carl Sagan announced plans Monday to petition the U.S. post office to create a postage stamp commemorating the former Ithacan.

Sagan, arguably one of Ithaca's most famous residents, was a professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences and Director of the Laboratory for Planetary Studies at Cornell University. He consulted with NASA, briefed astronauts and wrote or edited more than 20 books, including "The Dragons of Eden: Speculations of the Evolution of Human Intelligence," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize and "Cosmos," the best-selling non-fiction science book ever published in English.

The postage stamp commemoration is being spearheaded by the Sciencenter and the nearly year-old Sagan Appreciation Society.

Patrick Fish, founder of the Sagan Appreciation Society, said the society was formed in part to "carry on his work to some degree."

Members are "united by a respect of the scientific method and nature, strong interests in peace,

ecological protection and concern over how civilizations succeed or fail depending on how well they deal with their own technology," Fish wrote in a prepared statement about the society.

The idea to memorialize Sagan with a postage stamp grew in part out of a desire to recognize the scientist in a "populist" way and because Sagan enjoyed collecting stamps as a child.

Sagan has been honored by myriad scientific societies, but his contributions to making science accessible for average people inspired Fish to want to see Sagan honored in a broad way, he said.

Ann Druyan, Sagan's widow, planned to attend the Monday afternoon press conference showcasing the four stamp designs but was sick with the flu. She sent a prepared statement, which Charles Trautmann, executive director of the Sciencenter, read.

"Carl was an avid stamp collector as a boy, and we treasure the albums he made then. They're filled with his handwritten notes in the margins — perhaps the earliest evidence of his passion for the diversity of earth's cultures. So this particular tribute to Carl would have held special significance for him, as it does for me," she wrote.

Sagan was a founding member of the Sciencenter in Ithaca. He passed away in 1996, and in 1997 the Sciencenter dedicated the Sagan Planet Walk, a 1.2-kilometer scale model of the solar system that runs from downtown Ithaca to the Sciencenter.

Artistic renderings of the stamp designs will be available for the public to view at the Sciencenter's 25th annual gala from 7-10:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 28. Petitions to the post office in favor of the Sagan stamps will also be available at the gala for visitors to sign.

Fish said an online petition will be available through the Sagan Appreciation Society Web site, which is scheduled to be online by this morning: www.saganappreciationsociety.org.

Two of the four stamp designs were made by Pat Linse, a California illustrator who founded the Skeptics Society, Skeptic magazine and Jr. Skeptic magazine. They show Sagan holding a candle with a comet in the background.

One of the stamps, designed by Syracuse-born Greg Mort, shows a young Sagan with a starry sky in the background. Mort has been commissioned by NASA to portray major mission events, and his works are included in Sagan's "Pale Blue Dot."

The only stamp with a photo rather than a painting of Sagan shows an older, laughing Sagan with planets and moons in the background. The photo was taken by Syracuse photographer Michael Okoniewski, and the design was created by Lisa Hutter and Chris Fix at the Center for Inquiry in Amherst.

Fish said stamp designs are chosen by a committee of 13-15 individuals who meet quarterly to review submissions from the public. Even if a submission is approved, it normally takes three or more years until the stamp is actually available to the public, he said.

"We're confident that eventually we will get approval because of the merit of Carl Sagan," Fish said.

Trautmann and Fish urged citizens to send petitions on the stamp to the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o Stamp Management, U.S. Postal Service, 475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Room 4474EB, Washington, DC 20260-6756.

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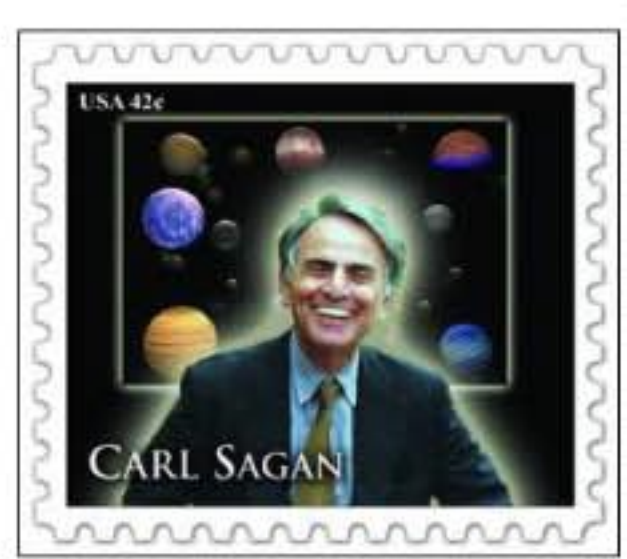
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