# NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

## Stars in a different sky

Astronomers Professor Don Kurtz and Dr Robert Walsh, from the University of Central Lancashire will be brightening up the 'gloom' of winter down under when they join the world's leading experts at the Australian Festival of Astronomy in July.

Professor Kurtz and Dr Walsh, from the University's Centre for Astrophysics, have been invited to lecture at the International Astronomical Union General Assembly at Sydney in July. In addition to this, they will be joining a prestigious group of roving astronomers giving lectures and answering questions about life, the universe and everything in a series of tours around Australia. There's a lot of excitement about the event, funded by the Australian Government and the British Council, with extensive coverage in the Australian press.

Professor Kurtz has promised to share the musical secrets of the universe with audiences in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. As the world-authority on asteroseismology (the vibrations of the stars), he will be asking Aussies to tune their ears to the 'singing'of the stars. Not actually the music of Kylie Minogue and her friends, but ringing which can be detected by sound waves in the stars that cause them to vibrate, get hotter and cooler, brighter and dimmer, bigger and smaller and change shape. The audience will get the chance to 'hear' the sounds of an amazing group of stars discovered by Professor Kurtz himself.

Meanwhile Solar physicist Dr Walsh has been rivalling Mulder and Scully in investigating his own Astrophysics X-file. Lucky Astronomy buffs in Sydney, Canberra, Wollengong and Adelaide will get the chance to hear about the magnetic personality of our closest star, the Sun. His research into the halo of electrified gases (the corona) that surround the Sun is uncovering fascinating information about its strong magnetic field. For example, while the light surface of the Sun has a temperature of 6000 degrees, the corona is at a temperature of two million degrees.

"It really is like an X-file", he says. "It is totally counter-intuitive that the Sun's temperature should rise as you move away from its surface...it's like walking away from a fire and suddenly hitting a hotspot, thousands of times hotter than the fire itself!"

So it's not actually a holiday in the sun or a night out with the stars for the two well-respected astronomers from the Preston-based University.

-more follows-

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"It'll be hard work,", says Dr Walsh. "But we're looking forward to the trip and to sharing our research with our peers and with the Australian public."

Further details of the International Astronomical Union Conference can be obtained from the website at www.astronomy2003.com . For more information about the work of the Centre for Astrophysics, go to www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/science/physastr/cfa or contact the University of Central Lancashire, tel: 01772 201201.

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Note to editors:

1. Professor Kurtz received his PhD from the University of Texas, USA, in 1976. He was at the University of Cape Town in South Africa from 1977-2001, when he joined the Centre for Astrophysics at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. Professor Kurtz is a world authority on the high-accuracy measurement of the brightness of variable stars. He discovered a new and unexpected type of variable star, and his work in this area has led to a greater understanding of the internal structure of such stars.
2. Dr Robert Walsh is currently holding a prestigious Research Fellowship by the Leverhulme Trust, and will conduct research in Solar Astrophysics, concentrating on how the Sun's atmosphere is heated. In December 2000, Dr Walsh was bestowed the title of 'Scientist for the New Century', after delivering an award-winning lecture at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in London.
3. Both Dr Walsh and Professor Kurtz can be contacted at the Centre for Astrophysics, University of Central Lancashire, tel: 01772 201201. For Media Enquiries, please contact Pam Culley, Media & Public Relations Office, University of Central Lancashire, tel: 01772 894425, pculley@uclan.ac.uk