

NASA's Kepler Mission Celebrates One Year in Space

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Artist's concept of Kepler in the distant solar system. Image credit: NASA/JPL

(PhysOrg.com) -- One year ago this week, NASA's Kepler mission soared into the dark night sky, leaving a bright glow in its wake as it began to search for other worlds like Earth.

"It was a stunning launch," recalled former Kepler Project Manager James Fanson of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif.

Following Kepler's spectacular nocturnal launch from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., aboard a United Launch Alliance Delta II rocket at 7:49 p.m. Pacific Time (10:49 p.m. Eastern Time) on Friday, March 6, 2009, science team members whooped with joy.

"Now the fun begins," quipped an ecstatic William Borucki, Kepler's science principal investigator of NASA's Ames Research Center,

Moffett Field, Calif.

Since the search began, NASA's plucky [exoplanet](#) hunter has achieved significant success in its quest to answer the timeless question: "Are we alone in our galaxy?" Two months ago today, Kepler scientists jubilantly announced the discovery of five large exoplanets (planets located beyond our solar system) named Kepler 4b, 5b, 6b, 7b and 8b.

The [Kepler Mission](#) is designed to observe more than 150,000 stars continuously and simultaneously for signs of Earth-size planets until at least November 2012. Some of the planets are expected to orbit in a star's "[habitable zone](#)," a warm region where [liquid water](#) could pool on the surface.

Provided by JPL/NASA

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