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**Local Alum and NASA Researcher to Discuss Meteorite Hunting on Mars at
Public Museum's Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium February 12th**

Grand Rapids, MI (February 3, 2009) – James W. Ashley, NASA Graduate Research Fellow and PhD Candidate of the Mars Space Flight Facility at Arizona State University, will present “*Meteorite Hunting on Mars – The Saga Continues*” at 7:30 pm, Thursday, February 12, in the Public Museum’s Meijer Theater. The program is free and open to the public, and is co-sponsored by the Public Museum and Grand Rapids Amateur Astronomical Association.

Jim was a program presenter and assistant producer at the Public Museum’s Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium in the 1980’s while a student at City High School and later at Grand Valley State University. He went on to obtain a masters degree in geology from Michigan State University. Ashley’s primary interest is the study of meteorites which have fallen to earth as well as other planets. At Arizona State, he has collaborated with Dr. Phillip Christensen, a principal investigator for the Mars Exploration Rover Mission, to include the search for Martian meteorites among the rover activities.

Ashley’s February 12th lecture is but one in a series of events planned as part of “the International Year of Astronomy. 2009.” An initiative started by the International Astronomical Union and endorsed by UNESCO and the U.N., the yearlong observance marks the 400th anniversary of Galileo’s first telescopic glimpse into the night sky. It is a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture. The Public Museum and collaborating organizations will host sessions, lectures and commemorative events throughout the year. Check the Planetarium’s website at grmuseum.org/planetarium for further details and a complete schedule of events. For information on the Public Museum, call 616/456-3977 or go to www.grmuseum.org.

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