

## Preface to the Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Wisconsin Space Conference

### **New Beginnings**

The challenge and excitement of starting something new is still with me as I write this, my first introduction to these Proceedings. As new Director of the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium, I am honored to serve this vibrant and powerful organization, and *very* grateful for the leadership of my predecessors, Dr. Yingst and the outgoing staff of the WSGC. Aileen leaves us having built the second largest Space Grant Consortium in the country and yet one that remains agile and responsive to the evolving needs of our affiliates.

Reading the papers and reports in this year's Proceedings reminds me again of the vital role Wisconsin plays in the engines of innovation and discovery that power our national space efforts. I am also reminded of the privilege we each share of using the WSGC to help our students launch careers. The efforts and successes we read about in these pages are the seeds for future lives in STEM fields and in aerospace, particularly. It is our core mission to support the kinds of educational and professional activities that provide pathways to careers, and ultimately, to the economic vitality of the aerospace industry in Wisconsin.

In that bright light, the theme of this year's Wisconsin Space Conference is timely and appropriate. Commercial Space has never before been such a source of both hope and anxiety. From the successes of SpaceX and Boeing in NASA's Commercial Crew Program contract announcements to the very bad week in late October that saw the loss of the Antares rocket and the tragic loss of human life resulting from the breakup of Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo, 2014 has truly been a defining year for Commercial Space.

For their role in shrewdly picking the perfect conference theme, I am grateful to Dr. Aileen Yingst and Tori Nelson, and to our conference host, Dr. Karin Borgh. I am equally grateful to Dr. Borgh for once again allowing us to use the beautiful facilities at the Biopharmaceutical Technology Center Institute for our annual conference. A better place to contemplate the future, I cannot imagine. Jeff Johnson, ORBITEC's Environmental Control & Life Support System (ECLSS) Program Manager for Sierra Nevada Corporation's Dream Chaser program, served as the keynote speaker. His presentation was widely regarded as one of the more engaging and instructive talks we've enjoyed. Student feedback on Jeff's talk suggested that his overview of commercial space efforts was eye opening and inspiring.

It is from this unique position of strength and hope that I invite you to peruse the articles and reports in these Proceedings. I think you will agree that the future of Wisconsin STEM/aerospace education and research is bright and worthy of your continued support.

Kevin M. Crosby, Director