

OBITUARY



YOLANDA GÓMEZ 1962–2012

Dr. Yolanda Gómez worked for more than 20 years at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). She was a founding member of what is now the Centro de Radioastronomía y Astrofísica (CRyA) at the Morelia Campus of UNAM, where she was a full professor. Those of us who knew her in person will miss her ready smile and the cheerfulness that accompanied her wherever she went.

Yolanda's research was the study of gaseous nebulae, both those associated with evolved stars (planetary nebulae), and those associated with young stars (compact HII regions). This research resulted in more than 65 published papers. Among her most notable results is the first detection of water vapor around an evolved star. This was unexpected because the radiation emitted by these stars should destroy any nearby molecules, and this discovery raises important questions in the study of evolved stars.

Yolanda was a generous and cheerful teacher, always willing to help and guide her students. Her enthusiasm led to many of her students becoming astronomers. She was a great promotor of the idea that science is for everyone, from specialists to the general public. As a result, Yolanda took an active part not only in the postgraduate astronomy program of the UNAM but also in the undergraduate physics program of the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, but also giving various courses outside of Mexico. Moreover, Yolanda gave a large number of talks, workshops, radio and television interviews and published more than 40 popular science articles in journals such as *“Scientific American Latinoamerica”*, *“¿Cómo Ves?”* published by the UNAM, *“Contexturas”* published by the Universidad Iberoamericana, *“Ciencia”* of the Mexican Academy of Sciences, and *“C+Tec”* of the Science Council of the State of Michoacán, Mexico.

Yolanda played a key role during the International Year of Astronomy in 2009 (AIA2009), organizing all of the public outreach events of CRyA as well as acting as President of the AIA2009 committee for the state of Michoacán. The 350 public outreach events occurring during this year attracted more than 100,000 visitors. The highlight was the *Noche de las Estrellas* at the prehispanic ruins of the Yacatas at Tzintzuntzán, Michoacán, an event supported by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) and the Alianza

Francesa, which an estimated 10,000 people attended. In addition, Yolanda contributed to the development of teaching materials for popularizing astronomy, for example, Astronomical Lotto, the *Memorama Astronómico* and *Enrédate con el Universo* games, as well as the 2009 Astronomical Calendar. She was an instigator of the outdoor hands-on science exhibition, known as the Path of Science, within the Morelia Campus of the UNAM, and was the coordinator of the design of the Astronomy Room of the Interactive Science Center in Morelia.

Thanks to the warmth, enthusiasm and dedication with which Yolanda took astronomy to the public, the state government of Michoacán awarded her the 2008 State Prize for Public Outreach of Science and Technology.

Those of us who were close to her, who knew her as a teacher, colleague, or friend, are going to miss her very much. We extend a warm embrace to Luis Felipe, her husband, and to Vicente and Cecilia, her children.

Rest in Peace, Yola.

Susana Lizano and Javier Ballesteros