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Women in Science: Chicago Honors the 150th birth anniversary of Marie Skłodowska-Curie

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Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) and the Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC) co-hosted the inaugural Women in Science Conference on September 18-19, 2017 on the University's Main Campus located in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. In conjunction with Northeastern's sesquicentennial celebration, this two-day conference honored the 150th anniversary of the birth of Marie Skłodowska-Curie, the mathematician, physicist and chemist who conducted early research on radioactivity. The Conference program (<https://chicagochech.org/event/women-in-science/>) brought together scholars, educators, students of all ages, their families and the Chicago community at large to celebrate the life, work, and accomplishments of Marie Skłodowska-Curie. Marie was the first woman to win the Nobel prize and the only person to receive two Nobel prizes in two different disciplines. This conference honor Marie for her discovery of radium and polonium, her remarkable push for the clinical adaptation of her laboratory-based findings to quickly benefit medical patients, and her extraordinary contribution to the fight against cancer.

Conference events included renowned international speakers from various fields of study, seminars, roundtable discussions, hands-on laboratory activities as well as a screening of the 2017 film "Marie Curie: The Courage of Knowledge." One laboratory experience in particular, entitled "Kids Who Stay Curie-ous" was especially designed for children in the primary grades and higher. Children of all ages and teachers-in-training had the opportunity to work in a lab with Marie (Emma Battaglia) and her daughter, Irene (Anna Ciecierski) to create an atomic model, observe a chemical reaction and examine x-rays. Other NEIU faculty in the laboratories included

Drs. John Albazi, Chemistry and Nabil Kahouadji, Mathematics. Finally the Embassy of the Republic of Poland showcased a photography exhibit on Curie's life, work and legacy.

NEIU President Emeritus, Sharon Hahs (Doctor of Chemistry) presided over the opening ceremony. Welcome remarks were also delivered by Tatiana Vallaey, attachée for Science and Technology for the Consulate General of France and Piotr Siemoniuk, Vice-Consul for the Consulate General of Poland. The evening's ceremonies also featured a memoir prepared by Professor Witold Zatonski, former Director of the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, Poland and read by Nephrologist Rafał Ciecierski – which highlighted the scientific accomplishments and social contributions of Maria Skłodowska-Curie.

Julie Des Jardins, author of "Madame Curie Complex: The Hidden History of Women in Science," along with Sophie Shrand, Education Coordinator for the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry and host of the web-based science series for girls entitled "Science With Sophie," served as keynote speakers. Des Jardins is a cultural analyst and historian of American women and gender. She has been professor of History at Baruch College, CUNY, and taught in the History and Literature Program at Harvard University. Her talk focused on Curie's American legacy and highlighted her visits to the United States and their significance for American science and culture, particularly in regards to women and their present-day career paths. Shrand is the creator and host of "Science with Sophie," a science comedy series. "SWS" is a fast-paced show that invites viewers to explore science all around them and remember that they are brave, curious, funny, smart scientists every day. The show is Sophie's lighthearted

solution to the serious problem of inequity in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields and underrepresentation of women in mainstream science media. Her presentation focused on how and why she created “Science With Sophie”. The talk left everyone in the audience inspired, energized, and ready to create change!

The conference showcased a total of six conference sessions that featured nearly twenty experts from various fields of study and who delivered exceptional findings about the role of women in research, education and the workplace, particularly in the areas of education, health and cancer. Session speakers included: Aleksandra Jarczewska, International Relations, from Warsaw University in Poland; Ewa Kuligowska, Radiologist from Boston University; Stella Nowicki, Microbiologist from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee; Cheri Shakiban, Mathematician from St. Thomas University in Minneapolis as well as Melissa Simon and Nicole Woitowich, from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. Several dedicated, female members of the NEIU faculty also presented including: Breckie Church (Psychology) with students Hannah Cohn and Theodora Koumoutsakis; Katherine Peterson (Music), Sudha Srinivas (Physics) and Jing Su (Chemistry).

The conference was sponsored and organized by the Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (Chicago CHEC). This Chicago-based collaboration is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and brings together Northeastern Illinois University, the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University (NU) and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The goal of Chicago CHEC is to establish an infrastructure that, in the spirit of Marie Skłodowska-Curie, establishes partnerships between the scientific and local Chicago community. Chicago CHEC strongly believes that meaningful cancer research, treatment, education and training must come from a diverse collaboration of academic and community.

DISCLOSURE

Authors report no conflict of interest.