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DEVON
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C. Nelson Carter belts out a tune with the JPL workers' Big Band Theory. Left, saxophonist Sarah Lundeen and other JPL scientists, computer whizzes and technicians keep things swinging at Thursday's NASA Honor Awards.

Bringing out the Brass

JPL swing group sends a different kind of message into space.

By Laura Winter, *The Leader*

LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE — On a given day, they work with precision instruments such as rocket engines, robot rovers and spacecraft sensors.

Thursday, a group of employees at

Jet Propulsion Laboratory replaced the high-tech gizmos with trumpets, saxophones, drums and a piano.

The Big Band Theory was in the house. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to join but it wouldn't hurt.

The JPL swing band, started its set Thursday with Bart Howard's "Fly Me

to the Moon." The occasion was the annual NASA Honor Awards — given to scientists and staff at JPL.

This year 21 awards were given to teams that worked on projects like the Mars Global Surveyor and Industrial Hygiene and Worker's Compensation.

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Awards were also presented to 75 individuals whose contributions ranged from deep space projects to just finding enough space to fit all the projects inside JPL's campus.

Employees at the laboratory know the band members as the world's most intelligent musical group. There are five Ph.D's who play regularly in the 20-piece big band. Dr. Ed Baroth, the bass player, builds reusable launch sensors for spacecraft.

"You may hear a better band," Baroth said. "But you'll never hear a smarter one."

Patrick Olguin, a software specialist for deep space missions, is a trumpet player. He and Brenda Burkhart, a computer programmer and trumpet player, formed the group after they played some Christmas tunes in the JPL courtyard over the holiday season. Olguin said all sorts of scientists and engineers were asking to join in.

"You can take the geek out of the band, but you can't take the band out of the geek," Olguin said.

Once a week, the big band gets together during lunch to rehearse inside the environmental test facility — a building where scientists can see how their inventions hold up in a

vacuum.

The first time the group played was just in May. But some members in the audience thought they had been together for a lot longer.

Jurrie Van Der Woude, JPL's photo and imaging coordinator, heard the band for the first time and was blown away.

"Is there anything this place cannot do?" Van Der Woude said. "Boy they're good."

Other songs in the Big Band Theory's repertoire include "Orange Colored Sky," "It Had To Be You," and "It's Only a Paper Moon."