

## *History of Vassar Brothers Institute*

John Guy Vassar and Matthew Vassar Jr., nephews of Matthew Vassar who founded Vassar College, recognized the need for an organization that would continue three educational societies formed during the 1870's to discuss science, literature and art. These societies merged in 1881 to form the Vassar Brothers Institute of which we are members today.

The Vassars were civic minded and generous. They built a Victorian multi-purpose building on Vassar Street in Poughkeepsie (on the site of their former brewery) and presented it to our trustees on November 28, 1882. It contained an active museum, library, arts studio and an auditorium seating 215 people.

Three sections of the Institute sponsored lectures, worked with farmers to increase agricultural knowledge, and offered popular courses in arts, civics and language. Each year since 1882 a series of lectures has been held, sometimes with as many as 19 programs. Several were given by Vassar College professors and other well-known public figures. Following World War I, public schools, given seed money from our endowment, took over many of these programs.

As our membership increased, we outgrew the original building on Vassar Street. It was sold in 1977 and now the Cunneen-Hackett Arts Center uses it to enhance its programs in the community. Since 1946 we have presented personally narrated Travel and Adventure Films in the Poughkeepsie High School. "Science in Your Life" lectures were started in 1983 and are presently held at Our Lady of Lourdes High School Auditorium. Not only do funds from our endowment subsidize both the travelogue series and the science lectures, they also support a variety of programs in the community that relate to the Vassar's objectives to promote education and useful knowledge in the areas of Science, Literature and Art.

Our membership as of the year 2011 is more than 800.

## VASSAR BROTHERS INSTITUTE OFFICERS 2011-2012

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Edwin E. Fitchett .....*Vice President*  
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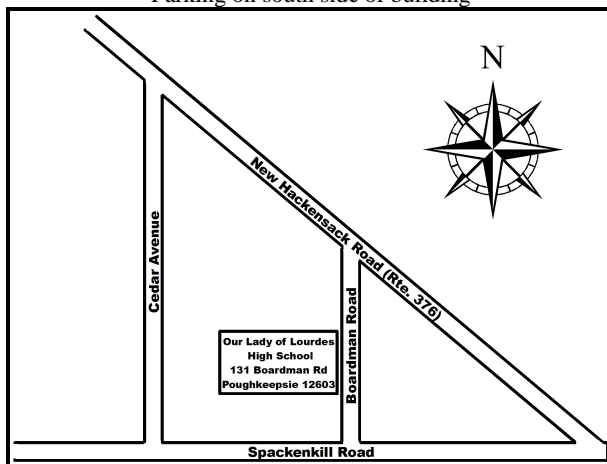
[www.VassarBrothersInstitute.org](http://www.VassarBrothersInstitute.org)

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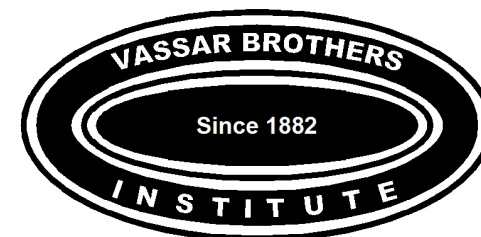
Maung S. Htoo  
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**Our Lady of Lourdes High School**  
**131 Boardman Road**  
**Poughkeepsie, NY 12603**  
Parking on south side of building



For information call: 845-473-0940

# SCIENCE IN YOUR LIFE 2012



Programs whose purpose is to bring together  
scientists and the lay public in the exploration  
of topics of general interest and concern.

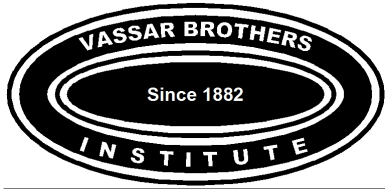
**ADMISSION IS FREE**  
No Reservations Required

The year 2012 series of three programs  
January 25, February 1, and February 8  
7:30 to 9:15 p.m.  
(doors open at 7:00 p.m.)

**Our Lady of Lourdes High School  
Auditorium**

Sponsored by:





Presents

# SCIENCE IN YOUR LIFE

Our Lady of Lourdes High School  
Auditorium  
7:30 - 9:15 PM

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

## FISHING THE CONGO: ISOLATION AND SPECIATION IN THE LOWER CONGO RIVER

Speaker: **Dr. Melanie L Stiasny**

American Museum of natural History  
New York, NY

Dr. Stiasny's ichthyological research has taken her throughout the tropical waters of Africa studying the evolution, behavior, and conservation biology of the continent's diverse freshwater fishes. Her recent work is focused in Africa's enormous freshwater heart – the Congo River. It is the second largest river basin in the world and drains an area the size of western Europe. It is also one of the least explored regions in terms of the extraordinary fishes it harbors. Recent discoveries in the Lower Congo suggest that this stretch of river is a "world apart" with deep underwater canyons and currents of extraordinary power and complexity that appear to be driving rapid diversification of fish species through isolation of populations living in very close proximity. In her presentation Dr. Stiasny will provide an overview of her recent researches in this remarkable river system and introduce a cast of ichthyological characters that are helping to unravel the complex evolutionary history of central Africa's fishes.

Dr. Stiasny is the Axelrod Research Curator of Fishes in the American Museum of Natural History's Department of Ichthyology. Her work has been featured in numerous media outlets including the New York Times and an appearance on the Colbert Report. Most recently her researches in the Congo River were featured in a National Geographic Television Explorer Special "Monster Fish of the Congo". She is a scientific advisor to many scientific and conservation organizations including the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, Conservation International and the World Resources Institute. She has authored numerous scientific papers, books, and articles and is a popular lecturer and participant in Museum travel and educational outreach programs.

Wednesday, February 1, 2012

## MARINE TURTLES AND CORAL REEF SYSTEMS AT PALMYRA IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Speaker: **Dr. Eleanor Sterling**

American Museum of Natural History  
New York, NY

Palmyra Atoll is a low lying, extremely remote coral atoll located halfway between Hawaii and Fiji, near the equator in the central Pacific Ocean. It serves as a baseline for studies of healthy reef systems, helping us to understand coral reef resilience, global climate change and its potential effects on coral reefs, and invasive species. Several threatened and endangered species, such as sea turtles, live on or visit the atoll. Much remains to be learned about sea turtle population size and behavior in remote foraging areas in the Central Pacific, hindering comprehensive management and conservation efforts. A team of scientists is undertaking research at the atoll to gather information required for the effective management of sea turtles and their ecosystems and to contribute significantly to knowledge of regional population distribution throughout the Pacific Ocean.

Dr. Eleanor Sterling is Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at the American Museum of Natural History and Director of Graduate Studies at the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology at Columbia University. She leads the development and coordination of the Center's national and international field projects and the development of curricula for undergraduate and graduate level education. Since 2006, she has served as the chair of the Palmyra Atoll Research Consortium and is directing collaborative work to document biodiversity at the remote Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife refuge in the Central Pacific.

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

## MAN AND WOMAN: AN INSIDE STORY OF NEUROBIOLOGY AND SEX DIFFERENCES

Speaker: **Dr. Donald W. Pfaff**

Rockefeller University  
New York, NY

Certain sex differences in the brain, important for behaviors tightly linked to reproduction, are very well understood. Mechanisms have been revealed, from hormones to gene transcription in specific nerve cells governing such behavior. These will be presented. On the other hand, historically, sex differences were thought to have much broader applications in human societies than is really justified. A new view will be discussed, one that avoids previous oversimplification.

Dr. Donald W. Pfaff is professor and head of the Laboratory of Neurobiology and Behavior at Rockefeller University, is a brain scientist who uses neuroanatomical, neurochemical and neurophysiological methods to study the cellular mechanisms by which the brain controls behavior. He graduated from Harvard College magna cum laude and received his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1965. He is a member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He also is a member of several scientific organizations related to studies of the central nervous system. The author of several books on the brain and behavior, he received the 2005 Award for Excellence in Professional and Scholarly Publishing (medical science category) of the Association of American Publishers for his recent book, Brain Arousal and Information Theory. He is the recipient of a share of the 2010 Ipsen Foundation Prize in Neuronal Plasticity.