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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Susanna Widicus, a senior chemistry major at Illinois Wesleyan University, was named the first recipient of the Eugene M. Shoemaker Impact Cratering Award. Widicus, a native of Mt. Vernon, Ill., was announced as the recipient of the award, named for a famous scientist, on Oct. 26 at the Planetary Geology Division's Business Meeting during the Geological Society of America's National Meeting.

The Eugene M. Shoemaker Impact Cratering Award endows $2,000 to any undergraduate or graduate student, working in the disciplines of geology, geophysics, geochemistry, astronomy or biology.

Ensuring students have an opportunity to pursue studies of impact cratering, the Eugene M. Shoemaker Memorial Fund was established in 1998 by astronomer Carolyn Shoemaker in memory of her husband.

A geologist by training, Shoemaker was a leading expert on craters and the interplanetary collisions that cause them. Shoemaker lived a short distance from Arizona's famous Meteor Crater and founded the U.S. Geological Survey's Center of Astrogeology in Flagstaff, Ariz., in the early 1960s. Shoemaker served as the center's chief scientist.

Alongside his wife and colleague David Levy, Shoemaker was most noted for the discovery of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, a comet which impacted Jupiter in July of 1994 and gave the world of science a major new insight into both the dynamics of comets and the planetary science of Jupiter.

The award money is to be applied towards the study of impact craters, either on Earth or on the other solid bodies in the solar system. The areas of study may include the study of the impact cratering process, the asteroidal or cometary bodies making the impacts, or the geological, chemical or biological results of impact cratering.

Widicus first learned of the endowment while presenting a paper at the Lunar Planetary Science Conference last spring. Widicus later submitted her IWU chemistry research honors project for consideration.

"I never really expected to win because it's open to any undergraduate or graduate student in any field anywhere in the world. I'm incredibly honored because Gene Shoemaker is one of the giants in the field," said Widicus.

Widicus's submitted project is a continuation of the graduate school work of her former advisor and former IWU Associate Professor of Chemistry and Chair of the Chemistry Department, Dr. Wendy Wolbach. Studying meteorite impact-related samples since her freshman year, Widicus analyzed and quantified samples from Norway and Canada in order to determine how small of a meteorite may cause extensive wildfires.

Widicus further plans to refine the techniques for analyzing the samples of varying aging compositions.

"The goal eventually is to develop certain techniques to be used for certain samples of certain ages or composition. And so, if we get the standard techniques set, then anyone in the field that wants to work up samples on any particular area can just look up our work and use that as a model for how they analzye the sample," said Widicus.

Widicus plans to use the $2,000 award for the purchase of laboratory supplies that will enable her to finish her chemistry research honors project.

Widicus plans to attend graduate school and further study impact cratering, cosmochemistry and geochemistry. Upon the completion of her graduate studies, she would like to be a professor of chemistry with a concentration in cosmochemistry.