

Einstein Medal for NZ professor

ASHLEIGH STEWART

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IAIN McCREGOR/Fairfax NZ

RARE HONOUR: Roy Kerr, the first New Zealander to be awarded the Einstein Medal, is reflected in a framed photograph he owns of the famous physicist.

University of Canterbury professor Roy Kerr has become the first New Zealander to be awarded the Einstein Medal.

The award is presented annually to individuals for outstanding service, discoveries or publications related to Albert Einstein.

Physicist Stephen Hawking was the first recipient in 1979.

Since then, many distinguished scientists, and six Nobel Prize winners, have been awarded the medal.

Kerr will be honoured by the Albert Einstein Society in Switzerland for his 1963 discovery of a solution to Einstein's gravitational field equations.

The Kerr solution, as it has become known, provided an exact description of the space outside a black hole, helping to understand how galaxies are formed, and becoming crucially important to the world of science.

Kerr, who was delighted by the honour, said his discovery was "certainly the most important thing that I've done and it's probably the most useful thing that's come out of general relativity in 50 years".

The award adds to a long list of accolades, including being made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2011 for services to astrophysics.

Kerr was a professor of mathematics at the University of Canterbury for 22 years before retiring in 1993. He is currently emeritus professor at the department of physics and astronomy.

He has been nominated for a Nobel Prize several times but has never won.

Kerr will travel to Switzerland to be awarded the medal at a ceremony at the University of Bern in May next year.

- The Press

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