

A family climate

Text Florian Meyer Photo Tom Kawara

Is it possible to juggle both a family and research? Ulrike Lohmann certainly thinks so. “You can only conduct top-level research on a long-term basis if you have a harmonious private life”, says the Professor of Atmospheric Physics. She has just won the 2013 “Golden Tricycle” prize, which ETH Zurich awards to staff in leadership roles who encourage a family-friendly working environment. The accolade is awarded jointly by the Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich (AVETH) and Equal!, the Office of Equal Opportunities. AVETH representative Martin Sack praises Lohmann: “She manages schedules in a way that allows pregnant women and parents to make time for families and partners.”

What matters to employees

Although she has no children of her own, Lohmann believes striking a balance between private and professional life keeps one motivated. In her own free time, Lohmann likes to go rowing. Recently She even took part in the professors’ rowing eight at the UNI-POLY regatta. “Rowing is important to me, so I have to make time for it alongside my work, just as people

with families do.” Lohmann is delighted that ETH staff are recognised for attending to employees’ personal needs.

Professor Lohmann gets to know what her 20 or so employees need to maintain a work-life balance by holding regular discussions: “I am well aware which of my employees have family responsibilities, who has to leave the office on time to pick up their children, or who is only here for part of the week because their partner is living abroad.” As a female scientist who has successfully established herself in the male-dominated field of physics, she also knows how important it is for women to be able to work part-time: “The option of part-time work makes a career in research attractive to women with children”, she

says, adding that “part-time roles should be available at a professorial level too. Female professors can still meet standards while working part-time.”

Of course, Professor Lohmann has her standards as well, namely that her employees take part in weekly group seminars and an annual retreat. As Head of the Institute for Atmospheric and Climate Science, she is in charge of two teams: one is responsible for modelling the climate on a global scale, while the other focuses on detailed studies of ice crystals: “Only through regular exchanges can we recognise the links between these two groups. This helps to make our research effective.” ■

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Absolutely delighted: Ulrike Lohmann (D-USYS) proudly accepts the Golden Tricycle Award.