



countdown

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Shuttle team waits for tank connector installation



◆ **Shuttle Update:** Installation of the external tank feed-through connector on Atlantis was expected to begin today.

The work is vital to the upcoming launch for mission STS-122.

◆ **FIRST Robotics Begins New Year of Competition:** The For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST, competition kicked off its 17th year on Jan. 5. Hundreds of Brevard County high school students will be working feverishly for the next six weeks to build a robot that will be able to race, move balls around a course and pick up them up.

To date, there are eight teams in the county. Volunteers from Kennedy are desperately needed to serve as mentors for the students. To apply as a volunteer, e-mail your name and contact information to Margaret Lewis at LewisM@brevard.k12.fl.us. You can choose which local team you would like to support.

Although all Brevard County students can participate, all high schools do not have their own team. Brevard Schools Superintendent Richard DiPatri wants to have a team at every high school by 2010 (for a total of 15), meaning more volunteers will be needed.

Mark your calendar for March 14-15 for the Florida FIRST regional competition hosted at UCF. It's free, and you can see for yourself this exciting and inspiring event!

For general questions, contact Lesley Garner at Lesley.C.Garner@nasa.gov.

FIRST robotic teams need volunteers for 2008

For more information on FIRST, go to <http://www.usfirst.org/default.aspx>.

■ **NASA Update** — NASA will host a media teleconference at 1 p.m. today to preview the historic Jan. 14 spacecraft flight past Mercury that will explore some of the last major never-seen-before terrain in the inner solar system.

NASA's MErcury Surface, Space ENvironment, GEochemistry, and Ranging, or MESSENGER, mission is the first sent to orbit the planet closest to the sun. It will use Mercury's gravity for a critical assist needed to keep the spacecraft on track for its orbit insertion around the planet three years from now.

During this month's Mercury pass, the probe's cameras and other sophisticated, high-technology instruments will take unprecedented images and make the first up-close measurements of the planet since Mariner 10's third and final flyby on March 16, 1975. The pass also will help to gather essential data for planning the overall orbital mission.

MESSENGER was launched on Aug. 3, 2004. After flybys of Earth, Venus and Mercury, it will start a yearlong orbital study of Mercury in March 2011.

Briefing participants will be Marilyn Lindstrom, MESSENGER program scientist of NASA Headquarters; Sean Solomon, principal investigator with the Carnegie Institution of Washington; Eric Finnegan, mission systems engineer with Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory; and Faith Vilas, participating scientist and director with the MMT Observatory at Mt. Hopkins, Ariz.

Related images about the MESSEN-

GER mission and flyby will be available on the Web at:

<http://www.nasa.gov/messenger>.

■ **KEA-13: Physics Lab Deliverables to the Shuttle Program** — Ever wonder about the special gizmos and gadgets needed for unique Shuttle Program support? Dr. Robert Youngquist will present "Selected KSC Applied Physics Lab Deliverables to the shuttle program" on Jan. 23. This 13th KEA knowledge-sharing event will begin at 10:30 a.m. in the Kennedy Training Auditorium.

The Applied Physics Lab, a continuation of the Optical Instrumentation Lab of the 1990s, has delivered numerous shop aids and innovative pieces of ground support equipment to the shuttle program since the early '90s. This talk will chronologically review these items, highlighting the problem being solved and the eventual solution. Youngquist will have a few tool samples on display.

NASA and contractor personnel are invited to attend. If you have any questions, please contact Gisele Altman at gisele.altman-1@nasa.gov or 867-4000, or visit the KEA Web site

<http://kea.ksc.nasa.gov> for past presentations, videos and knowledge-sharing information.

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