

Educator Astronaut Program in Full Swing

By Kim Hulsey

On Jan. 21, at the Hardy Middle School in Washington, D.C., NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe announced the official beginning of the Educator Astronaut Program in a renewed focus on education in support of NASA's Mission "to inspire the next generation of explorers...as only NASA can."

This program aims to motivate students and educators to pursue careers in science, math, engineering and technology. O'Keefe was joined by NASA Associate Administrator for Education Dr. Adena Loston, Chief of the Astronaut Office Kent Rominger, and Astronauts Leland Melvin and Barbara Morgan. Morgan is NASA's first designated Educator Astronaut.

Eleven days after the announcement, the Space Shuttle *Columbia* and its crew were lost. However, the Educator Astronaut Program, like the rest of NASA, will honor the crew by pressing forward. A quote from the Educator Astronaut Web site said, "We owe it to the *Columbia* crew not to give up; we must continue the journey they began."

The sentiment was echoed by Dr. Loston. "We will honor their legacy by continuing to pursue our mission goals," she said. "We believe that because of the space program's unique hold on the imagination of the young and the young at heart, we have a special opportunity to inspire and motivate our youth to explore the wonders of math and science."

The application deadline for the recruitment campaign – April 30 – is fast approaching. Employees, their children, spouses, extended family and community can support the program by nominating a teacher to become an Educator Astronaut.

What is an Educator Astronaut?

An Educator Astronaut is a fully qualified, permanent member of NASA's Astronaut Corps who has expertise in K-12 education. These Educator Astronauts will help lead the Agency in the development of new ways to connect space exploration with the classroom, and to inspire future explorers.

"We need an ambitious program," said Mike Kincaid, Chief of JSC's Education and Student Programs. Kincaid is also the Team Lead for the Educator Astronaut Program. "Our country needs more students pursuing science, technology, engineering and mathematics to protect our security and our way of life. The NASA team needs people skilled in these areas to continue its legacy of exploration and achievement."

Educator Astronauts will be qualified, full-time, permanent members of the Astronaut Corps with multiple flight opportunities. Their duties will be equivalent to those performed by other Mission Specialist

Astronauts – including spacewalks, International Space Station deployment, and experiment management. Once they have successfully completed their training, they will be eligible for multiple flights aboard the space shuttle and the ISS, helping coordinate space shuttle crew activity planning operations, and even assisting with science experiments. Every day, they will experience something unique that they can use to engage students and inspire them to consider technical careers.

When not in Astronaut Candidate or mission training, these Educator Astronauts will be on technical assignments within the Astronaut Office and working with NASA's education programs to convey their experiences to educators and students across the country. To help in this outreach effort, NASA will employ technologies and mediums such as telepresence, the Internet, video and other multi-media tools, as well as in-person engagements between the Educator Astronauts and America's educators and students.

What can I do?

"Everyone can be involved in this opportunity," said Melvin, Educator

Astronaut Program Co-Manager. The Program offers many ways to participate – from the educators who fly into space to the educators who later learn from their experiences, and from the students, parents and community members who nominate teachers and follow them through training and missions.

One way to get involved is to nominate a favorite teacher by visiting edspace.nasa.gov/nominate/nominate.html. Students, educators, friends and the general public can nominate any teacher for the program. All nominated teachers will be notified by NASA of their nomination, and it is then up to the teacher whether or not to apply. Or, interested teachers can apply without waiting for a nomination.

Employees can also be involved through Earth Crew, a Web-based initiative linking adult and student participants with space-based education activities and programs.

"The Earth Crew is an interactive program that lets teams here on the ground support our work in space with the NASA team," said Melvin. "In this way, the program embraces the entire community, not just NASA employees, to be involved with our work in space."

Earth Crews receive email updates, special Mission Assignments, and can help design future mission patches. The Earth Crew online resources also include astronaut profiles and training information, information on living and working in space, NASA career profiles and soon, a Virtual Astronaut feature.

For more information on the Educator Astronaut Program, visit www.edspace.nasa.gov or contact Bob Fitzmaurice, Ed.D.,

NOMINATE AN EDUCATOR

Anyone can nominate any teacher for the Educator Astronaut Program. It is then up to the nominated teacher whether or not to formally apply. However, a nomination is not a requirement for application.

To nominate a favorite teacher, go to edspace.nasa.gov/nominate/nominate.html and follow the instructions.

Educators who wish to apply may go to edspace.nasa.gov/apply/howapply.html and follow the instructions.

Applicants who do not have access to the Internet should contact their local libraries or call 1-877-EDASTRO (or 877-332-7876).

SPACE CENTER Roundup

The *Roundup* is an official publication of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas, and is published by the Public Affairs Office for all space center employees. The *Roundup* office is in Bldg. 2, Rm.166A. The mail code is AP121. Visit our Web site at: www.jsc.nasa.gov/roundup/weekly/ For distribution questions or to suggest a story idea, please call (281) 244-6397 or send an e-mail to roundup@ems.jsc.nasa.gov.

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