

# Giving NASA a voice

THE SPEAKERS BUREAU ALLOWS JSC EMPLOYEES TO SPEAK OUT ABOUT A TOPIC NEAR AND DEAR TO THEIR HEARTS—THE SPACE PROGRAM

by Catherine E. Borsché

What would happen if everyone in a choir had the same voice and tone when they sang? The music the singers would produce would be pretty dull, and not many would choose to hear it. However, consider what would happen if you added many different singers to a choir, each with a unique sound and musical quality. The music they produced would be stunning, with a wide array of melodic sounds and harmonies. Wouldn't you rather listen to that second choir sing?

That is how it is when one chooses to be an ambassador for the space program. The fewer people involved in spreading NASA's story, the less likely it is that the public will clamor to hear about what we are doing to benefit the world.

"I think there's a lot of misconceptions [about NASA], because really the only things the public hears about NASA is what's on the news or what they choose to go and read themselves," Jennifer Rochlis, human factors and robotics engineer, said.

The Speakers Bureau works daily to change that with a force of almost 200 speakers. The Speakers Bureau is responsible for coordinating speaking requests from the public, including schools, universities, conferences, clubs and more, and matching the requests with NASA civil servant speakers.

"In addition to speakers educating audiences on the roles they play in support of the space program, they inspire public support by personalizing NASA's presence in their everyday life. Most Americans know about astronauts, but are unaware of the scientists and other professionals that make up the majority of the NASA workforce," Linda Matthews-Schmidt, community relations manager, said.

"Young people in particular don't realize, unless they hear from a NASA speaker, that they can follow their chosen profession, be it a doctor, lawyer, accountant, engineer or even journalist, and still work for NASA."

To become a part of this "ambassador corps" only takes a few minutes.

"Those who are interested in joining the Speakers Bureau can just call or send me an e-mail and request to be put on the Speakers Bureau e-mail distribution list," Deandra Young, Speakers Bureau coordinator for the JIMMS contract, said. "Once they do that, about each week they'll get a 'Speaking of NASA' e-mail, an electronic flyer that lists all the new speaking opportunities that we have available."

Speakers then use that flyer to sign up for speaking engagements, which are on a first-come, first-served basis. It is also important to know that there are no "qualifications" to be a speaker. Since

each JSC employee's career and story has a unique slant to the overall NASA mission, the more volunteers the better.

JSC speakers believe deeply in their mission to spread the word about NASA.

"The big picture is that the Space Act says the number one purpose of this agency is to share our knowledge with the public," said Jack Bacon, systems engineer in the International Space Station Program Integration Office.

Bacon says that judging from feedback he has received, the public does care deeply about NASA and is reading about the space program. He often gets various questions about crewless missions, micrometeoroid debris and even going to the bathroom in space at speaking events.

Not only does speaking about NASA to the public benefit NASA, but it is also gratifying for the speakers. Many have wonderful memories from their speaking engagements.



JSC team members learn more about the Speakers Bureau and the resources available to them at an annual volunteer recruitment event in the Teague Auditorium.

"The ones that are really fun are the elementary school kids," said Mike Lutomski, risk manager for the International Space Station Program. "It's not as cool for [fourth or fifth graders] to show enthusiasm, but when they are in kindergarten, first, second or third grade, they just go bananas!"

Rochlis had a touching experience after speaking to a group of teachers and students with the NASA Explorer Schools.

"The moment that really stood out for me was when a young girl, probably no more than 7 or 8 years old, came to me and said, 'Oh, I thought that was so interesting. But oh my goodness, I could never be as smart as you,'" Rochlis said. "It really just made my heart break to think that here she is, already thinking that she can't do it, that it's beyond her. Being a young woman specifically doing these kinds of talks, I sat there and talked to her for a few minutes, saying, 'Of course you can, you absolutely can do it. If this is something you're interested in, you should do it full-heartedly. No one's going to stop you.' To me, turning her mind around that day was the most rewarding thing ever."

Jeevan Perera, also a seasoned speaker, had a lot of fun trying to explain to a young student how to use the bathroom in space.

"I recall one kindergarten student asking about how astronauts go 'potty' in space. No matter how I tried to explain that it was essentially the same as here on Earth with some minor differences to deal with the lack of gravity, the mechanics of it just perplexed him beyond explanation," Perera, a Crew Exploration Vehicle risk manager, said.

Speaking to the public also requires JSC employees, by default, to be up-to-date on the most current news within NASA.

"My favorite question was, 'Oh, I heard they discovered planet X.' And I said, 'No, no, it's not true.' And then I got back to my desk and I looked up some information on this new planet we'd found, and I went, 'These kids know more than me!'" Lutomski said. "From then on, I sort of catch up on all the new planetary sciences before I go talk."



Pleased to meet you, "Rocket Man." The Speakers Bureau allows its volunteers opportunities to work at events such as the NBA All-Star Jam session, where you can become someone everyone can look up to.

Speakers not only get to share the wealth of knowledge they have about NASA, but they are also exposed to the newest discoveries and fresh ideas.

"It certainly, in my job, pays to think outside of the box, and it's nice when they let you out of the box every now and again. Particularly when I speak at technical conferences, I learn something from every place I go," Bacon said. "Every now and again I stumble across something that I know we can use—for instance, printed electronics. It's changed the way that we do inventory, track hardware, the way we integrate our procedures. Getting exposed to that was exciting—a real information exchange."

And since the venues cover travel-related expenses for the speaking engagement, it's also a great way to see new places. Speakers have even been able to go overseas to talk about the space program. And, as Lutomski noted, the farther you are from Houston, the more "exotic" it is to be a NASA engineer.

The Speakers Bureau works to share NASA's vision with those who aren't ordinarily exposed to it or don't understand it. Many speakers enjoy the challenge of educating taxpayers on the importance of our exploration goals and what we have already accomplished.

"No matter what I talk about, I always throw in our Vision for Space Exploration. Now we can say, 'We're working on it, and you will be the kids that go to Mars,'" Lutomski said. "Another message I like to take out there is that this is your space program. That's what I try to stress—they are the customers for what we do."

To find out more about NASA's Speakers Bureau Program, visit <http://www.nasa.gov/about/speakers>

If you would like to find out how to request a JSC speaker for an event, visit <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/johnson/events/speakersbureau/speakersbureau.html>

To get added to the Speakers Bureau distribution and to begin receiving their weekly electronic "Speaking of NASA" flyer, contact

Deandra Young,  
Speakers Bureau coordinator, at  
[deandra.young1@jsc.nasa.gov](mailto:deandra.young1@jsc.nasa.gov)  
or 281/483-4754



NASA/JSC2005E20477



NASA/DeHoyos JSC2004E22678



NASA/Markowitz JSC2003E37672

continued from page 7

Texas A&M has been gathering information on the deer herd since 2003. “Once (Texas A&M scientists) had a population model, they administered a vaccine that rendered some of the does infertile,” Ideler said. “The intent is not to decimate the herd but make it more manageable.”

With JSC being surrounded by an eight-foot fence, Ideler said the deer live on site with very few coming in from the outside. “Some of the old-timers I have talked to say the deer have always been here,” Ideler said.

According to Ideler, the risk increases for a deer/vehicle collision from November to January, which is when does go into heat.

Ideler said that the fertile does will have their babies in May and June. He cautions people against interfering with the does and fawns, even if the fawns appear to be alone.

Ideler said that he hopes JSC team members will not view deer as a problem but enjoy them. “The deer are part of the environment,” Ideler said. “My greatest hope is that they appreciate and understand the deer.”

The majority of critters on site are much smaller than deer. One of the most abundant groups is squirrels. Also, rabbits can be seen

hopping around the center, and the occasional possum or skunk will be seen making its way from one set of shrubs to another.

A wide variety of birds can be found enjoying the landscape at JSC. Sandy Parker, an environmental specialist, said the numbers and varieties at JSC increase in the spring. “Springtime brings an abundance of birds to JSC due to migration from South and Central America,” she said.

Parker also said that there are a few birds of prey that can be seen patrolling the skies at JSC, including red-tailed hawks and falcons.

JSC’s mall is the sight of several ponds that are filled with koi and provide a safe haven for ducks. Walker said that the ducks are wild animals. “[The ducks] could leave if they wanted to,” she said, “but they have it so good here.”

The ponds also attract snakes, some of which are poisonous. All four types of U.S. poisonous snake can be found in the Houston area.

Parker said that workers at JSC should enjoy the wildlife at JSC, but they shouldn’t try to feed the animals. “People feed the squirrels and koi,” Parker said. “People don’t realize they might be doing more harm than good. They mean well.”

Not all of the animals at JSC are roaming free. JSC is taking part in a program with the Houston Zoo to breed the Attwater’s Prairie Chicken, an endangered species that is native to Texas.

“We have a total of 24 birds in the pen located behind Building 423,” Parker said. “These birds are held in captivity for breeding. It is all done under permits.”

People who drive down Saturn Road near JSC’s main gate can get a good look at another “captive” species, the Texas Longhorn. As of the end of February, there were a total of seven steers and heifers and one calf roaming the range—a 60-acre tract of land just west of Rocket Park.

The Longhorn Project, developed jointly by JSC, the Clear Creek Independent School District, the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo and the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America, provides local high-school students with a one-of-a-kind learning environment that combines Western heritage with state-of-the-art technology.

The natural taste of Texas isn’t limited to animals. JSC is now a test site for a new program developed by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the American Association of Landscape

Architects called Sustainable Landscapes. The Sustainable Landscapes program was formed to support the culture and values of the local community, improve and restore desired wildlife habitats and contribute to the overall health of the local ecosystem.

Parker said that the Sustainable Landscapes program brings several benefits to JSC and its workforce including newly designated wildflower areas that were seeded last fall.

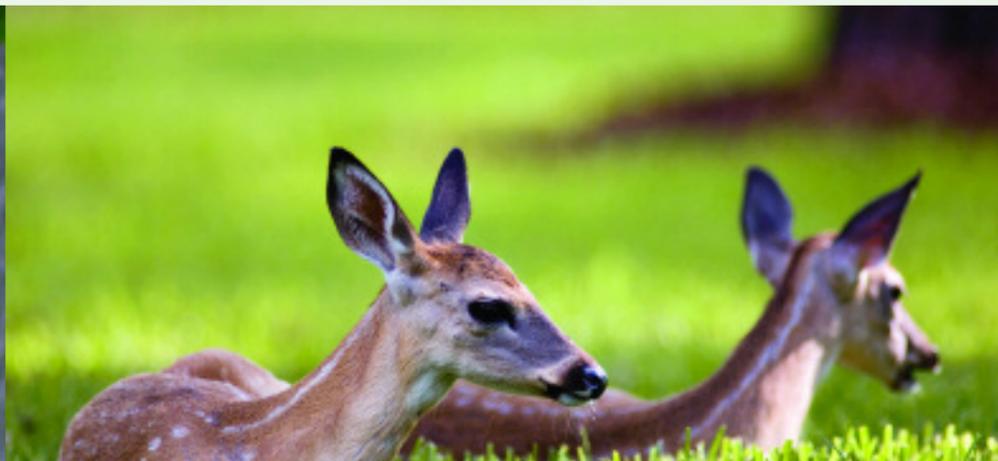
“One of the benefits is (the Sustainable Landscapes program) is a potential cost-saving method. If we get the wildflowers established, it will reduce the need for mowing,” Parker said. “Also, if (the wildflowers) get established, it will help to improve the working conditions.”

Parker said that the wildflower explosion may not be as brilliant this spring as it would normally be due to the dry weather that JSC experienced in the fall.

Parker said that the efforts to live with the wildlife and to promote nature at JSC go hand in hand with one of NASA’s missions. “We feel like we are connected to the NASA mission of trying to protect our home planet.”



NASA/Eddy JSC2006E08950



NASA/Blair JSC2006E40278



NASA/Blair JSC2003E56656



NASA/Markowitz JSC2006E11865