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SPACE CENTER

Roundup

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20 YEARS AND STILL SOARING

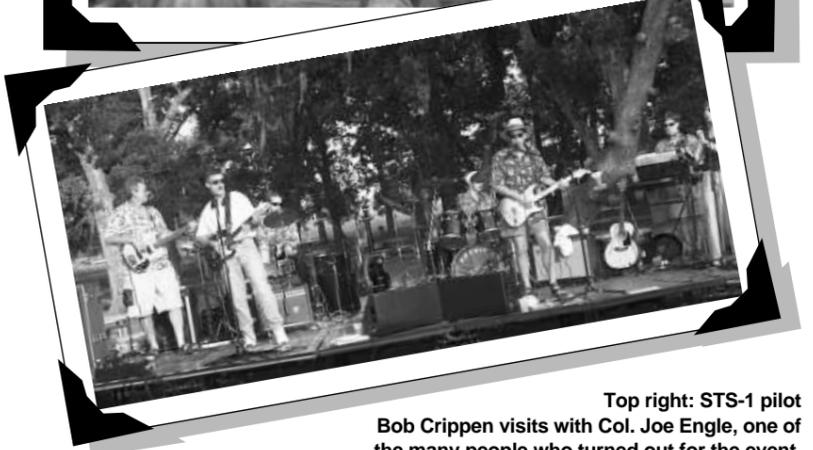
JSC STS-1 Anniversary Celebration Highlights April 13, 2001



Top left: Some attendees shared their personal memories and memorabilia.
Bottom left: STS-1 Commander John Young praises the people behind the scenes who made STS-1 a success.



Top right: STS-1 pilot Bob Crippen visits with Col. Joe Engle, one of the many people who turned out for the event.
Bottom right: The 'Rockit Scientists,' a JSC employee band, played at the party.



Mission accomplished

Ellen Porter Hillis has commanding presence in the Shuttle's 20-year history

By Melissa Davis

When Ellen Porter Hillis unplugged from her Mission Control Command Console recently for the last time, she left behind a proud legacy in her retirement.

Hillis is one of the few who was involved in every mission of the last 20 years. On top of that lofty accomplishment, she is also a pioneer of sorts. "I can remember when she was the only female on console and in the whole building. She has cleared the path for other woman to follow," her husband Larry said.

Today, women are prevalent on the Mission Control console. However, when she first began, it was a much different story. "I had to prove myself every day—each and every day," she said.

Like so many who have played behind-the-scenes roles in the success of the Space Shuttle program during the past

two decades, Hillis said she is proud of the work she has accomplished at Johnson Space Center.

Hillis has provided console support for all 103 Shuttle flights flown to date, starting out as a Shuttle Data Processor Telemetry controller for the first three flights and then moving to Houston Command for flight numbers 4 through 103.

Her experience is rare. "She can say that she has been in the control center for every Shuttle flight and 20 years of Mission Control console work," her husband said.

JSC has played a bigger role in Hillis' life than just employment—it's where she met her husband too. Ellen and Larry worked on the Mission Operations Computer Console together for five years. The couple dated about five years and then married in 1993.

"Working a console connected to hers, I understood the stress and craziness that comes with the changing shifts and weird hours," he said.

While the job is demanding, Larry said his wife is a consummate pro. "Ellen is one of those people who must always do the very best job possible. She can never just unplug from the console at the end of her shift and walk away," he said. "I have seen her stay for hours to ensure that everything was running O.K."

Through all the stress and changes Hillis faced over the years, her love for the job and the space program never faded. "It's been the people who have made it great," she said. "I have lots of good memories. I really will miss it here."

Hillis added that she will miss working with the Space Shuttle itself too. "The Shuttle is a fantastic vehicle. It's very complicated and a lot of fun to work with," she said.

Husband Larry said his wife truly loved her job. "The very essence of her well being is in the success of the Manned Space program," Larry said, "and with her leaving the Space Program, the program loses one more of those who gave their very best."

While Ellen is preparing for a life with much less stress, the reality of leaving her spot at the console is bittersweet for her. "It's traumatic to walk away from this," she said. ■



Ellen Porter Hillis recently retired from JSC after working on every mission of the Space Shuttle's 20-year history. She was also a pioneer for women in Mission Control.



Celebrate
Mother's Day
on May 13.
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Speedy Gonzales
entertains kids
at JSC picnic.
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Expo to show
off latest
technology.
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