

Media roundup for *Space Cowboys* press event



NASA JSC Photo 2000-05348 by Robert Markowitz

Press Weekend for the *Space Cowboys* movie presented JSC with an opportunity to share spaceflight news with the media. Shown here, JSC's Phil West shows actress Marcia Gay Harden an EVA glove while ISS Chief Scientist Kathryn Clark and a Warner Brothers representative look on.

Stars of a different kind were the focus of JSC for one brief weekend this summer. On July 22 and 23, JSC's high-fidelity mockups and unique spaceflight training facilities became the backdrop for *Space Cowboys*' Press Weekend.

As part of the event, JSC hosted more than 150 U.S. and international entertainment reporters to inform and educate them about spaceflight and NASA. The press, already treated to a special screening of the film Warner Brothers sponsored at a local theater, filled Bldg. 9 for live interviews and footage.

Shrouded in black tents placed throughout the Bldg. 9 mockups, were the movie's stars – Clint Eastwood, James Garner, Tommy Lee Jones and Donald Sutherland. Inside the tents, some of TV's most well-known entertainment media, such as *E!*, *Access Hollywood*, *Starz* and *Encore*, sought sound bites from the megastars.

The event was a unique opportunity to showcase the nation's space program to a different sector of the press corps. JSC and Headquarters' Public Affairs staff arranged several NASA speakers and exhibits in Bldg. 9 ranging from TransHab and space tools to the glass cockpit and virtual reality demos. Reporters and camera crews also were shown the Mission Control Centers and the Neutral Buoyancy Lab.

Costs incurred by JSC for the media interview portion of the event, as well as the filming of the movie, were reimbursed by Warner Brothers under separate Space Act Agreements. The Warner Brothers film was produced with the cooperation and support of NASA.

Lights, camera, action!

Much of the filming was done in Los Angeles, but many sequences were filmed at JSC including the Shuttle Motion-Based Simulator and the NBL. Scenes also were filmed at KSC including the Vehicle Assembly Building, the launch pad, and the astronaut ready room. Although the film is based on a fictional story, producers strived to make it realistic and plausible, even to the space experts.

To that end, some JSC employees technically advised film producers. Writers sought the advice of NASA Flight Director Bryan Austin who reviewed the script for technical accuracy.

"It was very satisfying to watch it after having worked on it with them," said

Austin. "To see some of the sequences in there that I suggested."

Austin said he could tell the writers were familiar with aviation terminology, but offered them more appropriate shuttle phrases for some of the dialogue. He also suggested some changes when it came to shuttle capabilities, such as deleting original scenes for a landing wave off and go-around.

"They went to great lengths to recreate things, like the MCC, accurately," said Austin. "When I first watched it, I was trying to pick out all the realities but once I reminded myself this was not a



NASA JSC Photo 2000-05354 by Robert Markowitz

Space Cowboys actress Marcia Gay Harden gets prepped for an interview during Press Weekend at JSC.

documentary, I found the movie really entertaining."

Austin notes actual shuttle footage is used in the movie, such as the landing scene which is actually Eileen Collins' historic STS-93 flight last summer with the shuttle name skillfully replaced by *Daedalus*, the shuttle name in the movie.

Some of the sounds themselves are also based on actual audio from space. Astronaut Bob Cabana worked with the crew on the set in Los Angeles last summer to provide assistance with the filming of the ascent, rendezvous and grapple scenes. While there, he provided noted Film Editor Joel Cox with an inflight video from one of his missions.



NASA JSC Photo 2000-05350 by Robert Markowitz

Entertainment reporters and camera crews from around the world convened at JSC's Bldg. 9, using space mockups as a backdrop for Press Weekend.

"I interfaced with most of the main characters giving them some pointers on what it's like to be in space and what

astronauts are doing during the various mission phases and why," said Cabana. "Being on a soundstage is quite an experience. In all honesty, I really enjoyed the technical aspects of the filming – how they develop the sets, the filming, and putting all the bits and pieces together. It's really a lot of work."

Brad Ball, Warner Brothers Pictures president of Domestic Theatrical Marketing, was on hand for Press Weekend and likened movie production to shuttle missions.

"This experience has been such a good reminder of all the technical support and

the hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands of people behind it to make it happen," said Ball of his visit to JSC. "It's sort of analogous to a film, if you will. You might see six or seven people on the screen, but behind that there are many, many people who spent a lot of weekends and time

away from their families to get it done."

According to Ball and Cox, creating a realistic movie about space adds more technical challenges to creating the film, especially creating the perception of microgravity.

"We created our own weightlessness," said Cox. "That was really the trickiest stuff we did – moving them around on arms, floating them around and using a little conveyer belt for the movements."

It also took some precarious positioning of the actors. "We've hung people from ceilings. We've had people stand around holding on to walls as if that were necessary to keep yourself from floating off, and then have ball-point pens and clipboards floating by suspended on filament lines," said Jones. "We've been on little stools that have caster wheels on them that move around. It really presents no challenge to an actor; all you have to do is stand there and take these various rides, but it's a group effort for the whole company."

"I wanted to make the film as believable as possible," said Eastwood, who directed the film. "In order to do that, we needed NASA's help to get as close as we could to the circumstances surrounding a launch. It's a complicated process and it requires careful planning and teamwork on all levels. Bringing a film crew in to simulate the whole thing was probably an even bigger headache for NASA, but the agency really came through for us. I couldn't be more pleased with the results." ■

Stars reflect on JSC, space program



CLINT EASTWOOD

On working at JSC...

It was great having the help and the assistance of all the people and the input of the various astronauts. Naturally, when you run the show down here [with] a lot of insiders, people who know what it takes to make the spacecraft go up, it's always a little bit nerve-racking, because these are people who know, even though you're doing a hypothetical story. Somebody called it last night "plausible fiction" and I think that's a great way to put it.

But we sure appreciate all the help that everybody gave us out here. We couldn't have done it without them, certainly not as well.

On the shuttle simulator...

My first landing was pretty good. I'm interested in aviation so that makes it easier but when you get to the space shuttle it becomes another realm.

On the space program in general...

Just to see the people and their enthusiasm towards their work. The dedication is pretty phenomenal here.



TOMMY LEE JONES

On perception of the space program...

Everyone admires NASA, everyone thinks correctly that the astronauts are heroes but not everyone has an awareness of the scale of things. All this stuff is really big. And it's hard to imagine that until you actually see it.



DONALD SUTHERLAND

On the people at JSC...

They inspired me and they gave me my character. Joseph Brodsky, a Russian poet, in a commencement speech said, 'Try to stay passionate, leave your cool to the constellations, passion alone is a remedy against boredom.' The people here; their sense of passion, the sense of dedication, sense of self-deprivation and the rigor of their work and their community... I was filled with admiration for them.

On special experiences while at JSC...

I'm a Canadian and I had the delight of using the Canadarm and the great pride that I did it successfully.



JAMES GARNER

On JSC...

Keep doing the work they're doing. The astronauts and the support that they have was very, very interesting.

Photos by Ken Regan