

Open House 2000 marks largest crowd ever



NASA JSC 2000-05966 Photo by Benny Benavides

Community lines up to see nation's home for space flight

From astronauts singing *Sweet Home Alabama* to one of the shiny, gold 1969 'Astrovettes' presented to Apollo XII astronauts - these likely weren't the sights and sounds many visitors expected when they came to Open House last month, but JSC's annual community event went above and beyond when it came to illustrating the many facets of our nation's human space flight center.

The Brewer family was part of the estimated 130,000 people who toured on site August 26 to see the famed NASA center and were amazed by how much there was to see and do.

"Those are astronauts?" said Mark Brewer when informed about the Max Q Astronaut Band. "We didn't realize that - that's great!"

The Brewer family found out about Open House through a flyer distributed at their son Thorton's elementary school.

Although they had been at JSC since 6 a.m., they still didn't think they'd have time to see everything.

"I think [Mark] could spend all day here by himself just listening to all the lectures," said Laurie Thorton. "There's just so much to do."

Although there were many repeat visitors to Open House, there were many people from our local area visiting JSC for the first time.

"This is my first time being out here and I am really enjoying it," said Jeff Elimon, a local resident. "You know for someone who has never been out here - it is very different than what I was

expecting... I recommend everyone come out and see it. Once I got out here it was really enjoyable. There's a lot to see and lots to do."

The members of Girl Scout Troop 161 of Los Fresnos, Texas, saved their cookie money for three years and chose to spend it to travel to JSC's Open House. Lora Seavy, 9, and Alanna Caraveo, 10, liked everything they saw throughout the day. Amanda Daniels was impressed with the computerized orbiter landing simulator.

"The experience will be one that this group of 9-to 12-year-olds will be talking about for a long time to come!" said Susan Upton, the Los Fresnos troop leader.

"Though only in its fifth year, this Open House appears to be a tremendous success."

Nearly twenty JSC buildings and NASA facilities, some open to visitors on this day only, were open to the public as part of JSC's Open House to show the public how our human space flight programs are developed, supported and carried out.

"We were greeted with a 'typical Texas welcome' at every turn. All the employees and volunteers patiently answered the scouts' questions and donned a big smile when the girls asked for a snapshot!"

— Susan Upton
Girl Scout Leader

The numerous booths and special exhibits were designed to educate visitors on NASA's various projects and the many benefits and emerging technologies of the space program.

In addition to some of JSC's most famed attractions, such as the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory's

6.2-million-gallon pool at the Sonny Carter Training Facility and the Mission Control centers, were opportunities to see some of JSC's newer endeavors. Visitors could see firsthand the X-38, try their hand at landing the shuttle via a desktop simulator or see tools that space walkers

use to help build the space station. Numerous astronauts also were on hand to talk about their activities and offer autographs.

But it was the hundreds of employee and contractor volunteers who brought the space program to life for the Open House guests. Volunteers dedicated numerous hours preparing for the event and many spent their Saturday at JSC to explain their role in the nation's space program.

"The volunteers, exhibitors and support workers for JSC Open House 2000 did a phenomenal job of pulling everything together," said Kelly Humphries, Open House chairman. "Their dedication and enthusiasm for the important work we do was reflected in the smiles of the thousands of people who visited our center August 26."

Vickie L. Kloeris, manager, Shuttle and International Space Station Food Systems, has been a committed volunteer since Open House originated and shares her enthusiasm for her work with visitors to the Bldg. 17 Space Food Systems Laboratory.

"I have been volunteering at Open House since it started," said Kloeris. "We've had an exhibit of space food in the lobby of Bldg. 17 every year of Open House and I have helped each year to staff that exhibit."

Kloeris was a crewmember for the 91-day Lunar Mars Life Support Test Project, which took place in the fall of 1997. Visitors who got to hear Kloeris' presentation about her experience as part of the experiment were intrigued and

amazed as they peered up to the test chamber where she and three other crewmembers resided for three months. In addition to staffing the exhibit in Bldg 7, which is related to that test project,

beginning last year Kloeris also has participated as a live presenter in Teague Auditorium regarding her experience.

"I participate in Open House because I feel it is important to share with the public what NASA is doing," explained Kloeris. "The balloon festival brings a huge audience to our doorstep and it makes a great deal of sense to open our doors to that audience. The thing I have found most

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enlightening for me is how little the average person really knows about the space program. Our best bet for public support for NASA is to educate the public on what we do and why we do it. Open House represents a fantastic opportunity to do just that. The thing I find most rewarding about Open House is seeing how interested the kids are in NASA and what we are doing."

Open House was held in conjunction with the Ballunar Liftoff Festival, a three-day event also held at the Johnson Space Center. The festival featured 100 or more hot air balloons, midway rides, games, skydiving exhibitions, balloon flights and booths. ■