

## Roundup Memories

### By Kelly Humphries

I remember coming to work at JSC in September 1986. It was a tough time for the agency, following the *Challenger* accident in January. The late Brian Welch was the editor of the *Roundup* at the time and had been the editor for about seven years. One of my initial assignments was as assistant editor of the bi-weekly *Roundup*.



NASA JSC 2001e39635 Photo by Robert Markowitz

One of my earliest stories was about the first underwater robotic arm to be used in what was then the Weightless Environment Training Facility in Bldg. 29. Up until then, there had been no way to simulate the use of the shuttle's robotic arm in space walk training activities.

Guy King was the engineer in charge of the project, and it turned out to be a very interesting feature. The real, electronic shuttle remote manipulator system can't even carry its own weight in Earth gravity, so King had developed a sturdier, hydraulic arm for use in the caustic environment of the pool. The story was a great tale of hands-on engineering work at JSC, something that was a priority at the time. And Guy remains a friend today.

Another early story that I remember working on was about orbital debris, or space junk. What started out as a single story turned out to be a two-part Feb. 6 and 20, 1987, in-depth piece about what continues to be a serious issue today. One of the prime interview subjects for the story was Joe Loftus, now assistant to JSC's Engineering Director, who even 15 years ago was an icon of engineering and orbital mechanics expertise.

He and Don Kessler, who raised the idea of space junk as a serious threat to our overall space program to the international level, explained the seriousness of the issue with an analogy that I'll never forget: Space debris orbiting the Earth travels about 6 to 7 kilometers a second; at those speeds a grain of sand has the destructive power of a bowling ball going 100 miles an hour. If that doesn't get your attention, you've probably already had a close encounter with a bowling ball.

We're still working with the world's space powers to build launch vehicles and satellite delivery systems that minimize space junk, and on protecting things like the International Space Station from such hypervelocity impacts today.

My first issue as editor was Sept. 25, 1987. The main article that issue was about the announcement that Disney Imagineering would design a new multi-million dollar visitor center for JSC, which eventually would come to be known as Space Center Houston. Then-JSC Director Aaron Cohen and Public Affairs Director Hal Stall were joined by local and national government officials for the press briefing. I'm sure they're all proud of what Space Center Houston has become today. It was also the issue in which the STS-27 crew was announced. Veteran Commander Hoot Gibson was to be joined by then-rookie flier Bill Shepherd.

Back in those days, PAO was using an early local area network of computers to

do all of its word processing, but that was before computer modems and data transfers were as commonplace as they are

today. I remember hand-carrying "copy" to an off-site contractor facility, where it was retyped by hand and laid out using layout sheets, offset type printers, Exacto knives and waxers by Sid Jones, who continued to be my "main man" on *Roundup* production throughout my tenure with the *Roundup*.

Jones, who still works in the JSC graphics shop that now is on-site, was and is a true professional who could work wonders

with the *Roundup*. Sid and I began work on a "revolution" in *Roundup* production, trying, failing, trying again and finally succeeding to set up a rudimentary system of sending the story copy from the *Roundup* offices in Bldg. 2 to the off-site typesetting location using computer modems.

I still get a warm feeling when I remember our first successful 300 baud transfer of a story sometime in early 1988. By comparison, we routinely use modems today that transfer data at a baud rate of 56,000 bytes a second. It took us months to get a stable transfer system working, but once we had done that it made possible a *Roundup* innovation—increasing the frequency of the *Roundup* from every other week to every week.

The June 10, 1988, *Roundup* was the first weekly newspaper for the center. It was more news-oriented than today's largely feature-oriented *Roundup*. But it was important then because we didn't have the immediacy of electronic mail and Web sites to keep JSC employees informed about what was going on at the center.

The *Roundup* was one of the primary mechanisms for making sure that the entire JSC civil service and contractor team knew what was going on, and this was very important in the months leading up to the return to flight with the STS-26 mission. Being able to communicate the agency's progress in returning the space shuttle system back to flight status was seen as an important task by JSC's top management, and doing that every week was a major accomplishment in which the entire *Roundup* team shared. The *Roundup* continued to be produced on a weekly basis until March 28, 1997.

Of course, the return to flight on Sept. 28, 1988, was probably the biggest story I wrote and edited for the *Roundup*. Thanks to the production streamlining work we had done using electronic transfers, we were able to get the news into the Sept. 30 *Roundup*, including news of the STS-26 crew's welcome home ceremony at Ellington Field following their landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

We followed that issue with an Oct. 7 issue that covered all the details of the successful mission, and chronicled the reactions of JSC employees. Those were exciting times at the Space Center, and they laid the groundwork for the 80 shuttle missions that have flown since and the construction of the International Space Station.

The other big issue I remember actually was a look backward. That was the July 14, 1989, commemorative Lunar Landing 20th Anniversary Edition, and it was

another first - the first (and so far, the only) full-color *Space News Roundup* cover.

Untold hours went into the production of that issue, which was made possible by the hard work of Julia Morgan and Jan Knight. We used the official 20th anniversary poster designed by artist Alan Chinchar on the cover, and a full-page photo of the Apollo 16 launch and a quote from President John F. Kennedy's now-famous 1961 Rice University speech on the back.

That issue included a dedication to the Apollo 1 crew who lost their lives in a Jan. 27, 1967, launch pad fire, as well as an amazing historical retrospective article on Apollo 11 by then-editor emeritus Brian Welch and an interview with the Apollo 11 crew. It also included personal reflections of Virginia McKenzie, who told the story of the families who supported Apollo workers like her husband, Joe McKenzie, and an interview with Apollo spacecraft designer Max Faget, whom I saw just the other day in a local hardware store, looking great.

I had the privilege of meeting all three of the Apollo 11 crew members during the ensuing anniversary festivities, and escorting Buzz Aldrin through the crowd at the splashdown party. What a celebration!

Over my 12 years as *Roundup* editor, I figure I coordinated the production of more than 500 papers. I tried to make

each one better than the last, and to share with JSC employees the best information available about what was happening at JSC and in the lives of the people here, who are the heart and soul of this center and this agency.

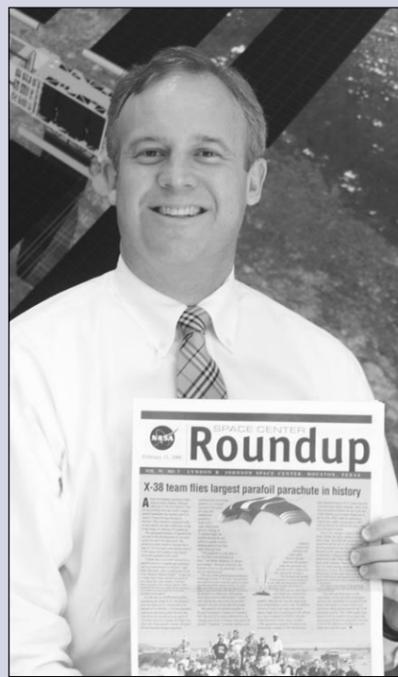
Throughout a dozen years, there were exciting stories to tell, there were heart-warming stories to tell, there were sad stories to tell. That's all part of the job of being an editor. But there are two things I'll remember most.

One is the education I received about how this center, its facilities, its programs and its organizations work to meet the daunting challenges of sending men and women into space, helping them do productive work that is crucial to the continued growth and survival of the human race and bringing them home safely.

Even more important, however, I will remember each and every one of the people whose lives touched me as I chronicled those activities, or whose lives I touched in some small way by being able to record their contributions for posterity.

My last issue as editor was Aug. 7, 1998, and fittingly, that issue was dominated by a tribute to Alan Shepard, whose Mercury/Redstone launch I watched on a tiny black and white television screen on May 5, 1961 and made me say, "Someday, I want to work for the space program." ■

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NASA JSC 2001e39633 Photo by Robert Markowitz

### By Bill Jeffs

When I reflect upon my years as editor of the *Roundup*, I think first of the outstanding teamwork that was involved in producing the newsletter every other week.

I had the great privilege of working with a very talented team of writers, editors, photographers, graphics artists and printers.

Without the proactive work of these professionals, the paper would never have hit the streets. I will forever remember being a part of such a great team.

I was hired by NASA in August 1998 to serve as editor of the paper, a position I held until March of this year. It was a great job for a new employee who wanted to learn about the work that JSC personnel perform on a daily basis - although I'll be the

first to admit that, at least for the first few months, it was a bit like drinking from a fire hose!

I had the privilege of interviewing numerous people about their jobs, from the engineers to members of senior management, from the scientists and researchers in the space and life sciences arena to those responsible for developing future spacesuits and life support systems - just to mention a few.

From biotechnology to nanotechnology, from the space shuttle and the International Space Station to meteorites and space food, it was fascinating to learn just how much work is performed here. Hopefully I was successful, with the assistance of many who served on the *Roundup* staff with me, in telling the many interesting stories about JSC's people - civil servants and contractor personnel - and their work to all of the paper's many readers, both on-site and afar.

Those were fascinating years - but hectic ones. The *Roundup* editor's job never ends. One issue is always going to press while articles and photos for the next issue are being compiled. I know that I drove those who did the layout absolutely crazy with my late afternoon and early morning calls after my many panic attacks about the accuracy of certain articles and cutlines or the layout of certain pages! I'm sure that they are breathing a bit easier now.

I count myself fortunate to be listed among the many talented journalists who have served as editor of the *Roundup* over the past four decades. Happy 40th anniversary, *Roundup*! May the center's fine paper enjoy many more years of success.