



Challenger Center's new gift shop should be a blast

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An important part of the renovation at the Challenger Center at Church and Jefferson streets in Woodstock is establishing a gift shop.

Steve Otten, executive director, smiled with a wide grin as he talked about the name of the shop opening about Aug. 1.

"We call it the Blast Off Gift Shop in keeping with the atmosphere of our educational programs related to the space exploration and students delving into the planets," Otten said.

Inside the gift shop, a look at the overhead light reveals the appearance of the bottom of a rocket taking off. Banners imitate smoke from the blast-off. The 24-foot-by-50-foot gift shop will feature a large mural showing a launch into space as a rocket takes off.

"This is a neat place for volunteers to help the Challenger Center at the gift shop," Otten said. "There's always something going on. We'll have astronaut ice cream, rocket and airplane pens and pencils, solar system mobiles, astronaut water bottles and other space-related gifts.

"This educational retail center will be open to the public and available in our front lobby throughout working hours."

The Challenger Learning Center for Science & Technology opened in 2001, the first center in Illinois to carry out extensive training and exploration. More than 10,000 children annually participate in programs at the Challenger Center, with students coming from seven counties in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin.

Woodstock's Challenger Center becomes a national showcase when the Challenger Center for Space Science Education invites cities to open a center.

Visit the latest educational attractions at the center including the 1882 DuPont telescope on loan from the Planetary Studies Foundation. The telescope weighs more than 1,200 pounds. By August, the center will feature a Forces of Flight exhibit, which teaches the forces of flight interactively. By September, a meteorite collection will be on display.

By: Don Peasley