



Challenger Learning Center welcomes astronaut

By DON PEASLEY

Date: October 26, 2006

A doubleheader highlighted a memorable evening at Woodstock's Challenger Learning Center for Science & Technology Oct. 17. The program featured the opening of a meteorite and space science exhibit and the appearance of astronaut Ken Reightler Jr.

The event attracted many elementary and high school students to see and touch meteorites and to hear Reightler's presentation on his work in space. He discussed how Lockheed Martin is moving forward to develop a crew exploration vehicle with the goal of having the vehicle ready to go to the International Space Station in 2014 and to the moon by 2020.

He added, "And beyond the moon to Mars."

Lockheed Martin is sponsoring four former astronauts to visit Challenger Centers around the country to mark the 20th anniversary of the Challenger Learning Center program.

Reightler praised the Woodstock Challenger Center and said he bases his observations after visiting many of the centers in the United States.

"This is a fabulous facility. The physical layout shows much thought and effort. I can understand how kids get excited about space and science when they participate in a mission," Reightler said.

Today Reightler is president of Lockheed Martin Space Operation after a distinguished career as a test pilot, an air space engineer and a participant in two space transportation system missions. The first was in 1991 and the second in 1994.

The 1994 mission was historically significant because it was a joint operation with Russia. It provided a significant improvement in the relationship with Russia and grew into an expansion of space exploration between the two countries.

"I am good friends with Russian

cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev whom I met on STS 60," said Reightler.

Paul Szipera, who is with the International Planetary Studies Foundation, unveiled the meteorite and space science exhibit. The exhibit is in the large room near the entrance to the Challenger Center on Jefferson Street.

The exhibit includes a significant private collection of meteorites by James DuPont, but the room also includes fossils, petrified wood and photographs of astronauts. After DuPont's death in 1991, the family gave the collection to the International Planetary Studies Foundation.

The center of attention of those at the opening of the exhibit was a large meteorite, about the size of a basketball, which had been found in South Africa.

The celebration included another highlight, opening the Blast Off Gift Shop adjacent to the entrance lobby.

Steve Otten, director of the Challenger Center, said the Challenger Center in Woodstock is one of 56 in the United States.

"At our center, we have 330 missions a year. We have one space simulator, and our goal is to purchase a second simulator and expand our capacity beyond the 10,000 students we welcome during the year," said Otten.