



Viking landing anniversary launches Challenger event

Date: July 22, 2006

Section(s): Local News

WOODSTOCK - Thirty years ago, Dr. Paul Sipiera was at mission control in Tempe, Ariz., when the Viking landed on Mars.

On Friday, he spoke at the Challenger Learning Center for Science and Technology to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the spacecraft's landing on the Red Planet.

"We need to be reminded of the historical aspects of our space program," said Sipiera, a planetary geologist who serves as the president and CEO of the Planetary Studies Foundation. "For old folks like myself, we ate, slept and drank this stuff when it was going on."

As part of the program, attendees could visit the STARLAB, an igloo-shaped inflatable planetarium where constellations were projected onto the ceiling. Folklore stories about the stars then were shared.

Sharon Price of Grayslake and her 9-year-old daughter, Samantha, hopped on an eight-minute flight from Meigs Field to O'Hare Airport in the Boeing 737 flight simulator. "Let's just be glad I'm not a pilot," Price joked.

She learned about the center from another parent and called to enroll her daughter in a camp when she heard about the special event. It was a positive learning experience, Price said. "It was our first time, and we'll see if we can come back soon," she said. "We'll spread the word."

An interactive "Ed-Venture" exhibit area also was available, and an IMAX movie about the space station was shown.

About 10,000 students, fifth grade and up, visit the Challenger Learning Center to re-create space missions each year, said Windy Krepel, lead flight director and curriculum coordinator.

Although the center usually is used for school field trips, there are special events open to the public, she said. For example, on Oct. 17, astronaut Ken Reightler, who piloted the first joint U.S. and Russian space shuttle mission, will visit the center.

Also, for \$10 on the first Friday of every month from 6 to 8:30 p.m., the center offers the Family Science Night Series, which focuses on a different theme each month. Another public attraction slated for the near future is a museum inside the center. Sipiera hopes that it will open in August.

There are a few spaces still available for summer camps. Cosmic Camp I, for students who have completed grades 5, 6 or 7, runs from July 24 to 28 and costs \$250. Cos-Mini Camp, for students who have completed grades 2, 3 or 4 is on July 31 and Aug. 1 and costs \$75. For information, call the center at (815) 338-7722.

By SARAH SUTSCHEK