

The write stuff



Boeing-sponsored space camp inspires teachers to help their students explore new frontiers

By Patricia Soloveichik and
photos by Eric Shindelbower



Immersed in rocket science, steeped in the drama of NASA history, then flipped, flung and dropped in a series of astronaut simulations, teachers from around the world left the Boeing-sponsored Space Academy for Educators program last month with a renewed appreciation for their role in extending new frontiers—both in education and space.

“Boeing has a great deal to be proud of in the history of the NASA space program, but the investment they are making in you today is about building the future of space exploration,” said Robert “Hoot” Gibson, describing the benefits that hands-on learning beyond the classroom can bring to teachers and their students. A longtime space shuttle pilot, Gibson addressed educators attending the 20th Boeing Space Academy. He was one of several speakers who briefed teachers about NASA endeavors, as well as the current state and future challenges of space exploration.

Hosted by the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala., and sponsored by Boeing, the educators program is designed to inspire and help teachers engage students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. Teachers from 11 countries and 17 states were represented this year.

Space exploration still has the power to inspire kids to pursue the difficult coursework required of STEM curricula, said Rhonda Cox, a high school physics teacher from Illinois and summer instructor at the Boeing camp.

“Kids will just blow you away if you give them a chance,” Cox said. “You have to really challenge kids; they rarely disappoint your expectations.”

Many of the teachers attending the camp were looking for ways to connect kids to careers in engineering and technology by capturing their imagination.

“This is all so removed from our small island,” said Kimberly Kaai, from Molokai, Hawaii. “Being here will help me to bring those possibilities back to the students. I’ve heard directly from people who have done this and experienced some of it in the simulations, so I can share those experiences.”

Students and teachers gathered before dawn on July 21 to watch the landing of Space Shuttle *Atlantis* and talked about having gained a greater appreciation for the complexity of the technology.

“There is so much speculation about the end of the shuttle program and what that means, but the kids are just as excited as ever because of all the talk about deep space exploration,” said Beth Keller, a Huntsville teacher. “That feels like their frontier.” ■

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PHOTOS: (Page 13) Sami Shehab from the United Arab Emirates is taken for a spin—one of the many simulations that help teachers better understand actual astronaut training through hands-on learning beyond the classroom. **(Inset)** Space camp instructor Rhonda Cox, a physics teacher from Illinois, helps a student simulate repair of a tile on the space shuttle as if in orbit.

(Pages 14–15, clockwise from far left) Branson Lawrence, left, of St. Louis acts as space shuttle mission commander with Huntsville, Ala., teacher Beth Keller as pilot; Shmuel Berman of Israel (foreground) closely monitors environmental controls during an *Atlantis* mission simulation as Laura Schmidt and Mike Avara, both from Illinois, work mission assignments; Kyutae Kim, left, of Seoul, South Korea, and Patrick Mangan of Oregon ready their rocket for launch; Vera Lucia Pereira, left, of Brazil builds a small structure with teammate Annie Keehn of Oklahoma, mimicking work outside an orbiting NASA spacecraft.

