

Local students to witness final shuttle launch at space center

Rome-area science kids envision return to the moon

After final shuttle mission, what's next?

BY SETH BORNSTEIN
The Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A somewhat generational battle over NASA's future is escalating even as NASA is about to close the book on the space shuttle era.

As a rainy forecast threatened to delay the last space shuttle launch set for today, former astronauts and some current top managers are sipping up their criticisms of the agency.

They see ending its only way to get astronauts into space as a dead-end strategy. NASA's chief critics that his agency is heading somewhere new for a change and dismisses critics as people who "must all be living on another planet."

The critics say NASA is ignoring its own long-standing advice: Have a backup plan.

Once shuttle Atlantis has completed its mission, NASA won't have a way to get into space for years except hitching a ride on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

First moonwalker Neil Armstrong, first American in orbit John Glenn, Mission Control, Commander Chris Kraft, Apollo 13 commander Jim Lovell, first shuttle pilot Robert Crippen and others are rushing for a last minute reprieve for the about-to-be-retired space shuttle fleet.

It's a generational



Olivia Acher, 8, left, and Alex Woodward, 8, listen Thursday as Teal Sembab, a teacher at St. Paul's Nazareth Daycare, talks about a model of the Columbia shuttle on display at the Children's Museum in Utica.

Local students

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By DANIEL P. BADER Observer-Dispatch Posted Jul 07, 2011 @ 06:10 PM ALBANY —

When the space shuttle Atlantis rockets into space Friday (weather permitting), it will end the country's manned spaceflight program. Maryann Bulawa, 15, however, is optimistic that someday the U.S. will return to the moon. Maryann and her sisters Lilly, 13, Adia, 10 and Jennie, 7, are at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., hoping to see the historic final shuttle launch. The sisters are part of the Neighborhood After-School Science Association, a Rome area collection of students who have done award-winning science experiments in their home. They were invited by NASA to view the launch. They recently wrote essays about the end of the shuttle program, so have put some thought into the future. "I don't think this is the end of the space shuttle, it's the beginning of something new," Maryann said. "I think that we've outgrown it, and we need something new."

That "something new" actually is something old — a return to the moon. The last time man ventured far from Mother Earth was on Apollo 17 in December 1972 — almost 40 years ago. "I think the next step should probably be going to the moon again," Maryann said. "(Space) is the only thing left to explore, and when you explain it that way kids understand it." She said the technology is there, and there is a will to do it. Lilly agrees. "I think that even though it's ending, it's not the end," she said. "New things are going to come up." The girls and their father, Erick, are bringing four cameras to capture the launch, and Maryann will keep a journal to write down her thoughts throughout the weekend. "Really, I'm one of the few people who gets to see the shuttle launch," Maryann said. "And it's especially special because it's the last one." If the Bulawas sound familiar, it's because it's not their first brush with NASA. NASSA, the short name for their afterschool group, has spent years thinking about space, and gets most of its experiments from NASA's website.

Indeed, **the group, which is sponsored by the Children's Museum**, recently won a trip to the Glenn Science Center in Ohio to load its low-atmosphere agriculture experiment into a weather balloon. It was through that experience that they got the tickets for the historic shuttle launch. Maryann said Atlantis is her favorite shuttle now because of the launch. She said she got interested in science and space from watching shuttle launches on television with the rest of the family. Before they were given the tickets, she said the afterschool program participated in an essay contest about the future of space travel and the end (of the shuttle program). "It was something little, but we really wanted to try and get involved and show how excited we are, because we are really excited," she said.

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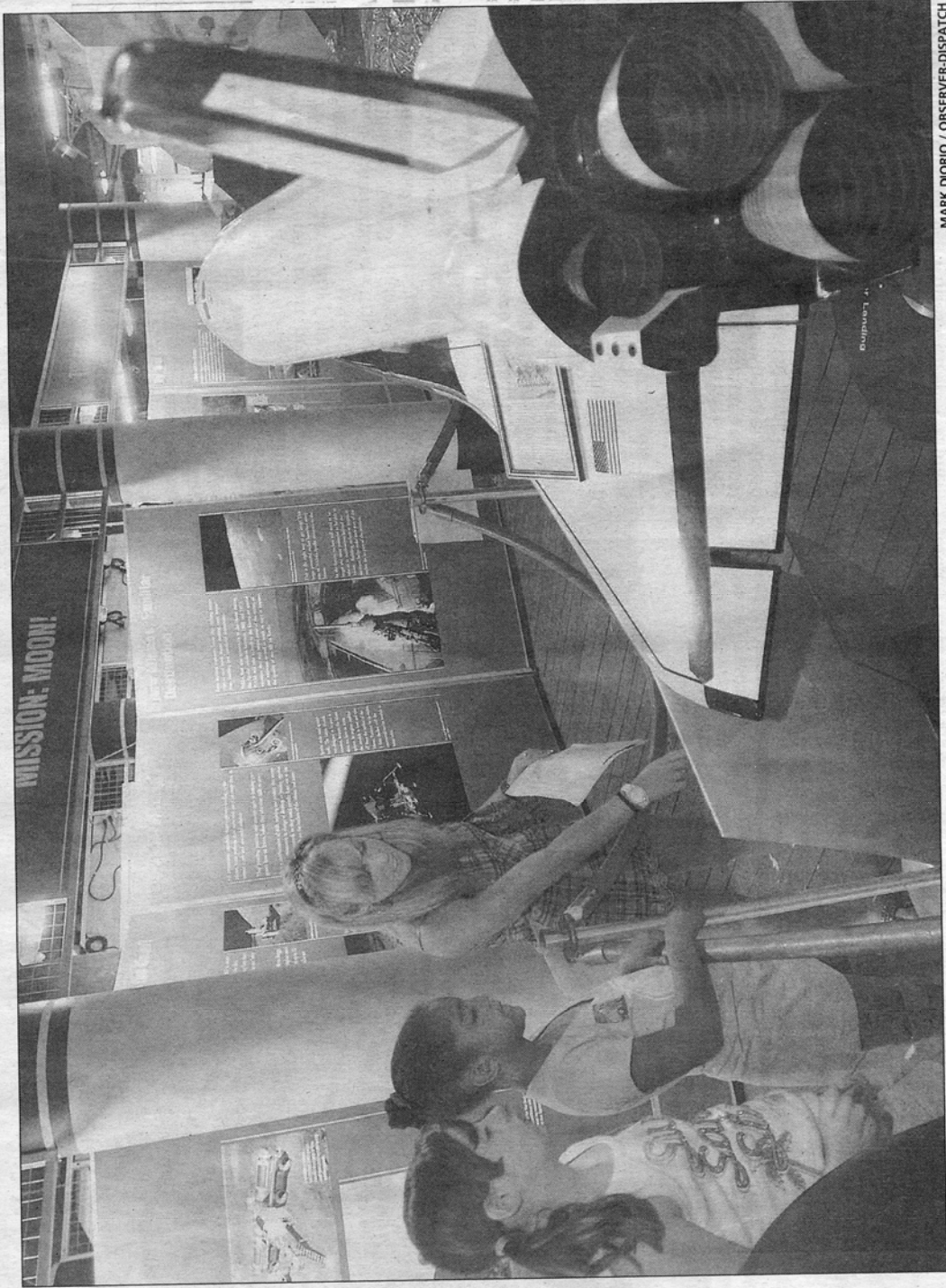
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