Two Astronauts in Two Weeks: Out of This World

Science Education Continues Long After They’re Back on Earth

By Carole Perry, WB2MGP

To say that the end of October and the beginning of November 2013 were exciting times for me and some of my students would be to put it mildly. With space and student education in the forefront, it was hard to keep my feet on the ground. Photos A and B.

At the end of October, I had been invited to do a radio presentation at the Lentana Community Middle School in Florida, Photo C. The technology teacher at the school, Robert Pauley, Photo D, was the first recipient, several years ago, of a Radio Club of America (RCA) grant from my Youth Activities Committee. I enjoyed meeting with him again. He continues to garner nationwide recognition for his good works. I was delighted at the response of Ms. Keester’s sixth graders in the gifted track.

Since it’s a Florida school, and I was already all excited about taking my twin granddaughters to the Kennedy Space Center
the next day. I did a lesson on astronauts and radio communications. Their questions and responses were analytical and well thought out. It was great fun.

Once before, I had done a presentation with the ham radio to special needs classes at this school. I had a request to come back again. I could not have been more delighted at the interest and attention of the autistic 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. Their questions to me, as well as their follow up thank you letters, were wonderful. All teachers and instructors who follow my column will understand the feeling of satisfaction after teaching lessons at both ends of the learning spectrum, and then receiving appropriate and appreciative responses from both. It was a day well spent. I, of course, gave my commitment to offer assistance through RCA Youth Activities to any teacher wanting to start a radio/technology program at the school.

On the drive to the Kennedy Space Center the next day I shared with my granddaughters the fun experience I had with my students back in April 1991 when we contacted the "All Ham Crew" on the Atlantis space shuttle.

Back then I was lucky enough to have received an invitation from astronaut Jay Apt, N5QVL, to visit the crew of STS-37 at the Johnson Space Center. All these years later, former students still come back to reminisce about the excitement they remember when Jay got on the ham radio and had the students designing a space suit on the board.

His invitation to visit the crew at the Johnson Space Center was immediately accepted by me, as I booked my flight to

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**Photo B.** Col. Steve Nagel, N5RAW, an Atlantis astronaut, met with students at Lebanon (Missouri) High School. (Courtesy of WB2MGP)

**Photo C.** Sixth-grade students get a lesson in space science and amateur radio at Lantana (Florida) Middle School, compliments of Carole Perry, WB2MGP. (Courtesy of WB2MGP)
Houston, Texas. What followed was a once-in-a-lifetime experience: getting to meet all the astronauts who were going up into space the next week on board the Atlantis space shuttle.

Two generations later I found myself escorting my grandchildren to have the incredible experience of visiting the new Atlantis exhibit at the Kennedy Space Center, and to be able to chat with former astronaut Jerry Ross, who was one of the crew members on that SAREX (shuttle amateur radio experiment) flight.

He signed their copies of his new book *Spacewalker: My Journey in Space and Faith As NASA’s Record-Setting Frequent Flier*, Photo E, and has ignited a whole new excitement for them about pursuing technical studies.

Purely by an amazing coincidence, two weeks later, former astronaut Col. Steve Nagel, N5RAW, also from the same Atlantis flight, was a special guest at my Youth Forum at the ARRL Midwest Convention in Lebanon, Missouri, Photo F, and at a presentation at local Lebanon High School to an audience of excited avionics and engineering students.

Photo D. Lantana (Florida) Middle School technology teacher Robert Pauley several years ago was the first recipient of a Radio Club of America (RCA) grant from WB2MGP’s Youth Activities Committee. (Courtesy of WB2MGP)

Photo E. “Spacewalker: My Journey in Space and Faith As NASA’s Record-Setting Frequent Flier” is an account of the space exploits of NASA astronaut Jerry Ross.

Photo F. Astronaut Col. Steve Nagel, N5RAW, was WB2MGP’s special guest at the Youth Forum during the ARRL Midwest Convention in Lebanon, Missouri. (Courtesy of Gary Avery, N0RMD)
"It was so wonderful to watch young people have the opportunity to ask questions of a person who had actually gone into space many times."

It was so wonderful to watch young people have the opportunity to ask questions of a person who had actually gone into space multiple times. I threw out the invitation to any student who wanted to know more about becoming a ham to contact me. I also invited the teachers and administration to get in touch with me to learn how to set up a program that will let their students be able to speak on the ham radio and possibly make contact with the International Space Station.

At the Youth Forum the next day, I had two young speakers. Sterling Coffey, NOSSC, is the former Youth Editor for the ARRL. He gave a terrific presentation on his "Experiences with College and Ham Radio." There is definitely a niche here for us to explore, as we encourage our young people to explore technical programs in their colleges.

Jacob Keogh, KD0NVX, age 15, did a beautiful job with his topic of "Different Niches in Ham Radio." Jacob has been invited by me to be a presenter at the Dayton Youth Forum in May 2014. He is a great role model for teenagers considering ham radio as a hobby.

Col. Nagel was a huge hit, of course. He not only gave us a brief history of the shuttle program, but spoke of plans from the government and commercial interests to investigate and research new programs for transportation and exploration of space.

The audience of adults and children were wonderfully responsive to the opportunity of interacting with our astronaut guest. Youngsters got to ask questions of a unique human being who was so gracious and wonderful about answering so many questions all weekend, as well being so very patient about all the requests for picture taking.

This was an extraordinary experience for everyone lucky enough to partake in this convention. I am so grateful to Col. Nagel for providing the rest of us with an experience we will never forget.

Special thanks must also go to the convention committee of the Lebanon Amateur Radio Club, which was tireless in its efforts to make this be the huge success it was.

Ron Lowrance, K4SX, and Bill Wheeler, KD0DEW, were the liaisons who spearheaded the efforts for almost two years. Mike Edwards, WB9M, and all the other hard workers who were gracious, hospitable, and so much more helped make the event be as successful as it was.

According to Bob Niel, K9EID, who played a major role behind the scenes, there was an attendance of about 3,300 people. He shot an episode of "Ham Nation" with Gordon West, WB6NOA, and George Thomas, WSJDJX, from the convention. There was no admission charge, free parking, and an outreach to all in the area to come.

The ARRL was very well represented in their forum. Dave Sumner, K1ZZ, Cliff Ahrens, K6CA, the Midwest Director; and other staff always provide the latest happenings and other information about our hobby and service. An invitation to attend the ARRL Centennial in July was extended to all.

I was also happy to see the vendors who are so supportive of our Dayton Youth Forum: Ray Novak, N9JA, from ICOM; Richard Stubbs from MFJ Enterprises; and Phil Parton, N4DRO, from Kenwood.

Kudos are extended to all those who had a part in producing the ARRL Midwest Convention in Lebanon, Missouri in 2013.