

At home on the moon? Maybe before long

BY SHERBY KAHAN

The moon has come a long way since it was dismissed as a lump of green cheese, whose main job was to influence the tides and provide a romantic setting for lovers. Difficult though it is to believe, in the next decade or two the moon is to be colonized, and a Livonia firm hopes to be in on the excitement.

The company is Space Colonization, Inc., a subsidiary of Contamination Control Laboratories which occupies a lot of terrestrial turf on Farmington between Schoolcraft and Plymouth.

This organization has a charter you won't believe.

"It says our goal is to use sophisticated techniques to make colonization of space and the moon a viable condition," said Space Colonization's energetic president, Dr. Philip Austin, who has a doctorate in aeronautical engineering.

THE FIRM, recently admitted a proposal to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) which if accepted will place the Livonia firm smack dab in the middle of the moon colonization program.

The proposal involves the identification of the various kinds of business that could make money on the moon and in space. We would have to identify the industry and then prove it can be carried out, noted Austin, who is a Livonian. This is a 16-month project that could be followed by prototypes that would further prove what could be done.

Pictures prepared by its artists reveal that companies are already turning to a mining industry, and to business quarters and living arrangements for moon colonists.

We like to prove to the world that space can produce can economic benefits for us all, stated Austin. Space projects are not something to be continuously subsidized by the government for experimental reasons.

Those who either gape or complain loudly at the enormous sums of money spent on space exploration might want to ask what can the moon and space do for them.

Austin is ready with an answer. Samples of moon rocks reveal an abundance of elements that are in short supply here," he maintained.

"They indicate that rare earths in our chemical table are not rare earths there. We haven't even learned to work with some of the elements because there are not enough of them on earth. But we know a lot of them have strengths and electrical conduction properties that are very desirable."

Austin also sees the heavens as a great source of energy.

"With proper devices located in space, the sun's energy can be collected and transported back to us," he beamed.

HE SPOKE of the possibility of the space production of certain solid collectors which can convert sunlight into electrical energy and which might have a mass market on earth. These collectors use a special type of film which makes them cheaper to produce than present solar cells which use expensive silicon chips.

But the film must be prepared in a vacuum. To build one would make the project too expensive.

"The only economic way to make these solar film collectors is to make them in space which is a vacuum," said Austin.

Austin's interest in space goes back to the time when he was an officer in the Air Force and might have become an astronaut.

"The first love of the astronaut is flying and then science," he said.

"My first love is science and then flying. Besides I didn't think I wanted to spend 10 years in training and then have a respiratory infection cancel me out of a flight."

While in the service he was an expert in an unusual field. He had worldwide responsibility for clean rooms, rooms that are absolutely sterile and built many for NASA.

He carried this interest into civilian life founding the Contamination Control Laboratories, which produces filtering devices that cause a room to become sterile thus enabling firms such as drug companies to experiment with sophisticated medicines without any type of organism affecting the studies.

He never lost his interest in space, however. When the U.S. was hurtling moonward all kinds of scientific equipment, NASA wished to avoid transporting earth organisms better left at home. Austin's firm was hired to help.

As a result in 1970-71 terms such as laser reflectors were coming to Livonia from the Bendis plant in Ann Arbor to be cleaned and packaged in special plastic containers and then sent on to Cape Canaveral and the big push upward.

You were wondering why laser reflectors were needed?

Austin is used to bounce off laser beams from earth for measuring distance," explained Austin. "You can't have dust on them and still get a correct measurement."

THAT'S THE thing about Austin. He drops these Buck Rogers things on you as though dust on laser reflectors were no different from dust on his shelves. He speaks of moon colonies as though they were just as possible as a housing development in the next county.

"By 1980-85 there will be operating colonies on the moon for technicians," he declared. "By the year 2000 it may be possible to have tourists."

Looking at the moon as the new frontier, Austin claimed that the controlled environment for Lunarians would not be too different from the environment in which many Michigan residents live today.

They go from an air conditioned or heated house to an air conditioned or heated car and to an office, the environment of which is also controlled," he said.

He finds that this controlled environment would be easier to maintain on the moon than on earth.

"You wouldn't have to use fuels," he said. "All you would need is a pump to pump chemicals into a solar collector to pick up heat to send back to the living quarters. If you want cooling just pump chemicals through the shadow areas which might be 100 degrees below zero."

His own company has already proved that it is possible to grow certain foods under artificial light, temperature and soil conditions by producing a hydroponic prototype. He would like to sell the idea not only for use by moon residents but also by nations where the food supply is frequently uncertain.

Austin believes that people living on the moon will feel they weigh only about 25 pounds because of the lack of gravity.

We'd be tremendous bundles of energy," he said. "We'd need only four hours of sleep a night because we wouldn't have to overcome the pull of gravity."

AUSTIN ALSO had some other news for those who have not been following moon plans as closely as they might.

A space shuttle has already been constructed and is being tested," he said. "It would carry a 45,000 pound load into space."

There is so much going on in space that people don't know about. To remedy this Austin would like to

mastermind a synthetic space colony in the Detroit area where moon balls could take a pretend space voyage, and even come down on a synthetic moon surface.

It would be a private venture, but I would hope to get funding from private industry interested in the possibility of profits in space," he said. "We would arrange a procedure so that an individual can feel he's in on the action."

Austin, who would doubtless take off to the lunar surface at the drop of an invitation, has been a consultant for numerous space programs.

For the current Viking mission, his firm provided engineering information on how to build the robot's equipment so that it would remain germ free.

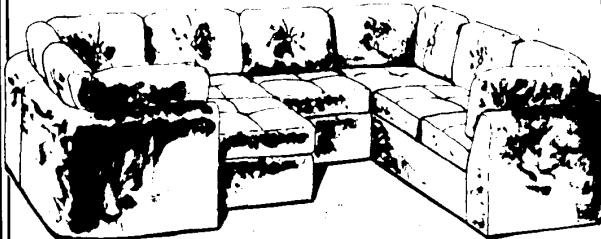
Company experts also designed packaging so that chemicals taken by the unmanned craft would not spill open during the flight and the landing.

NOT neglecting home-bound interests, Austin once assumed the rare position of leader of his daughter's Girl Scout troop, and has also been his son's Cub Scout leader.

doubtless when Space Scouts are organized, he will be ready to serve again.

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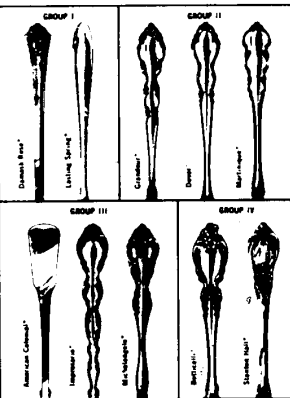
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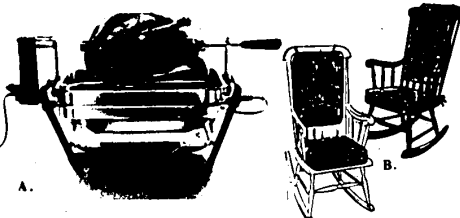
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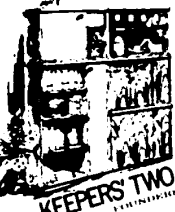
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