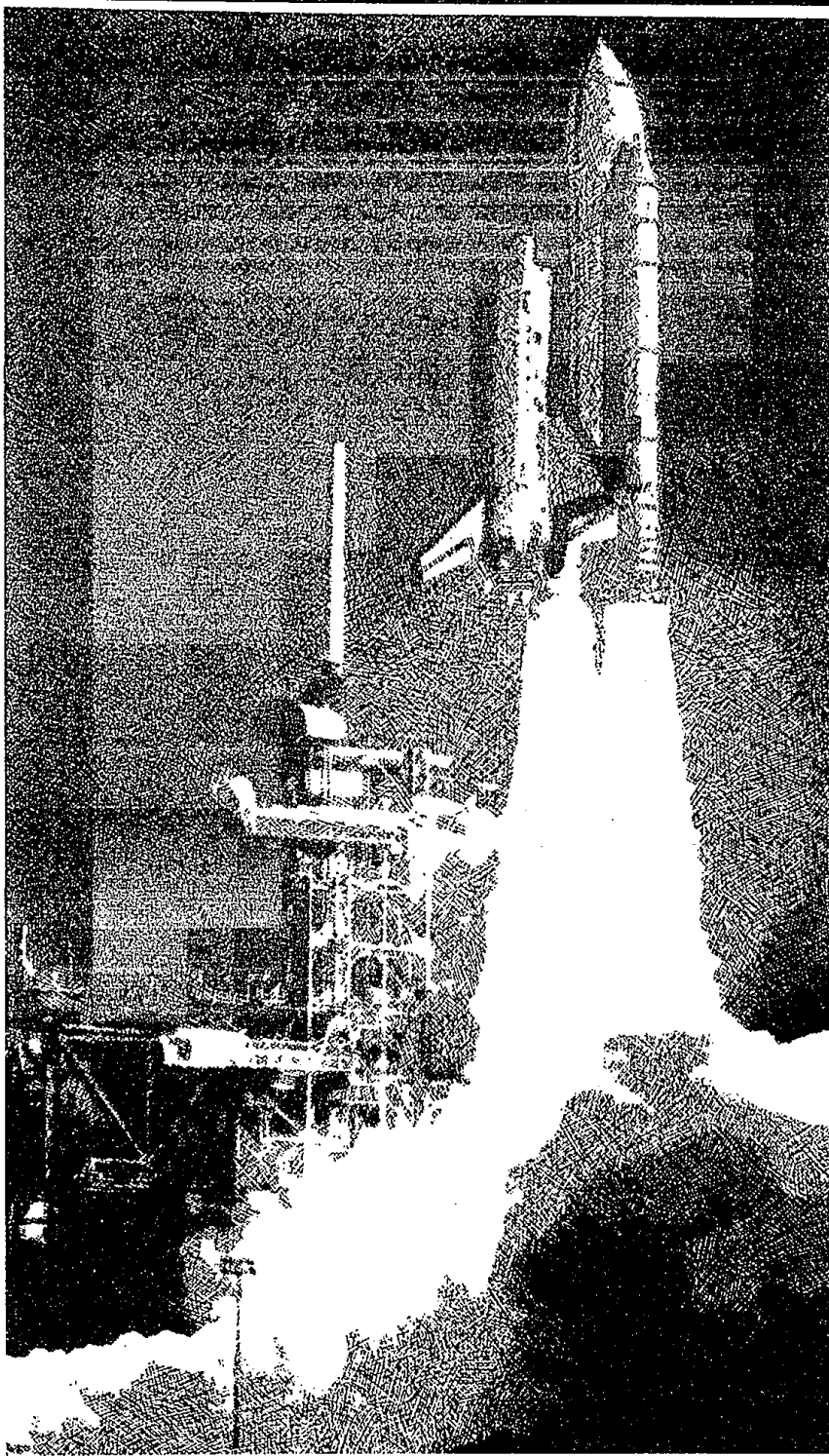




Space trek

NASA rebounds after Challenger

By Debbie L. Sklar
special writer

Feb. 18, 1988, could be one of the most important dates in the history of the American space program.

That is the tentative date for the launching of the shuttle Discovery — the first shuttle launch since the January 1986 Challenger disaster.

A lot of people around the world will be on the edge of their seats that day, not the least of them the Discovery's crew — Commander Rick Hauck, pilot Dick Covey and crewmen Dave Hillman, Mike Lowe and George D. "Pinky" Nelson.

GOING UP again will be a risk, but it's a risk that must be taken, in the opinion of Jim Loudon, freelance astronomer/lecturer and a staff astronomer at the University of Michigan Space Exhibit Museum.

Loudon said space exploration isn't a luxury, it's a necessity for a planet of five billion people.

"That's far more than the resources of earth alone can support in anything like a decent standard of living, no matter how we might redistribute them," said Loudon, who spoke on the space program recently at Birmingham Seaborn High School.

"That and not scientific exploration reasons is why humans themselves have got to explode into the resources of space in the next few decades."

BUT NASA, of course, has been working very hard to make sure that there are no more explosions such as the one that destroyed Challenger and its crew last January.

"You can't go through what this agency has gone through in the past year without putting safety of the crew at the top of the list," said Mark Hers of NASA's Space Station office in Washington, D.C.

NASA has corrected the main cause of the explosion, the defective "O" rings on the shuttle booster, according to Steve Nesbitt at NASA headquarters at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. There are now three rings instead of one, and each has a new joint design, plus heaters around them to keep the seals at the correct temperature.

Side rocket boosters are currently being tested, and if they work correctly the launch should go on as scheduled, Nesbitt said.

HE STRESSED that the shuttle involved in the Challenger disaster was itself sound and did not contribute to the explosion. Nevertheless, NASA is working on a possible way of ejecting the crew in case another explosion should occur, he said.

The space agency is developing a hatch tractor rocket system that would contain seven or eight tractor

'You got to feel sorry for the lives that were lost, but when you're working with the state of the art and where no man has ever gone before, things like that can happen, and everyone knows that.'

— Joe O'Dougherty
former NASA advisor

rockets that would yank the crew members out with a tremendous amount of speed. The astronauts' life necessities would be taken care of on the way down by the FLISS (Personal Life Support System).

Joe O'Dougherty of Northville, former technical advisor for astronaut training at Cape Kennedy, said he feels confident about the changes NASA has made.

"FRANKLY, I THINK everything is under control, and what they explained to me sounded very logical," O'Dougherty said. "Because when you stop and realize the number of flights in the space program we've made, the Challenger crew are the only ones we ever lost (in the shuttle program), it's fantastic because no other country has done anything like that."

"You got to feel sorry for the lives that were lost, but when you're working with the state of the art and where no man has ever gone before, things like that can happen, and everyone knows that."

Despite the dangers, he said he wouldn't mind trading places with a member of the Discovery crew.

"IF THEY would ask me to go up tomorrow, I wouldn't hesitate for a minute," he said.

Beyond next year's crucial launch, what lies ahead for the space program? Nesbitt said to keep your eyes on these developments:

- The Heavy Lift Launch Vehicle that would deploy satellites by radio control, without the need of a crew.

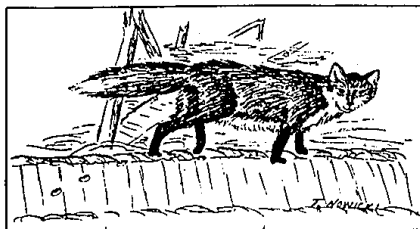
- The National Aero-Space Plane, which would take off horizontally instead of vertically and make suborbital flights at a speed of 18,000 mph.

- A space station that would enable people to live and work in space.

"A space station would allow us to bring the satellites to the station and check them out before putting them into orbit," Nesbitt said. "It could serve as a refueling platform also."

As to its existence, I am sure that Congress in the near future will decide about its outcome."

Car serves as a blind for fox watching



By Timothy Nowicki
special writer

As I entered I-275 at Seven Mile heading north the other day, I saw a red fox in a clearing near the entrance ramp.

I stopped on the ramp and observed the fox from inside my car. A car serves as an excellent blind from which to view wildlife. Animals cannot see the human outline and thus are not frightened.

With the aid of my binoculars, I was able to watch his head movements as he searched in holes and hiding places for prey items. Red

fox, one of two species of fox found in Michigan, have a varied diet.

During winter they feed on small rodents, rabbits and carrion. In summer, they will supplement their diet with insects and berries.

WHEN THIS fox began hunting in the ditch near the fence that borders expressways, I got out of my car and approached on foot. He was so busy concentrating on finding food that he was unaware of my presence.

My view through the binoculars made him appear like he was only 10 yards away. After a short time, he walked down the ditch and out of sight.



nature
Timothy Nowicki

Red fox are most active at night, but if food is scarce, they may have to extend their hunting schedule. This fox may have had a litter of pups to begin caring for.

Five pups are born, on the average, during March and April. This puts an additional burden on the adults to procure food.

ADULT FOX may travel about five miles a night in search of food. In Michigan, the area where a fox is found — its home range — is about 955 acres. Within this area, adult fox will find food, dig an underground den, raise young and defend the area from other fox.

Fox were not very common in Michigan before the lumbering era. After the large tracts of pine, and hardwood forests were cleared, scrub lands, meadows and fields developed, which are prime habitat for red fox.

Their numbers increased because of man's interference. It is ironic that the hand of man is also destroying the field habitat where I saw the fox.

Overpowering the cat-like tracks of the fox were the tracks of a Cottontail.