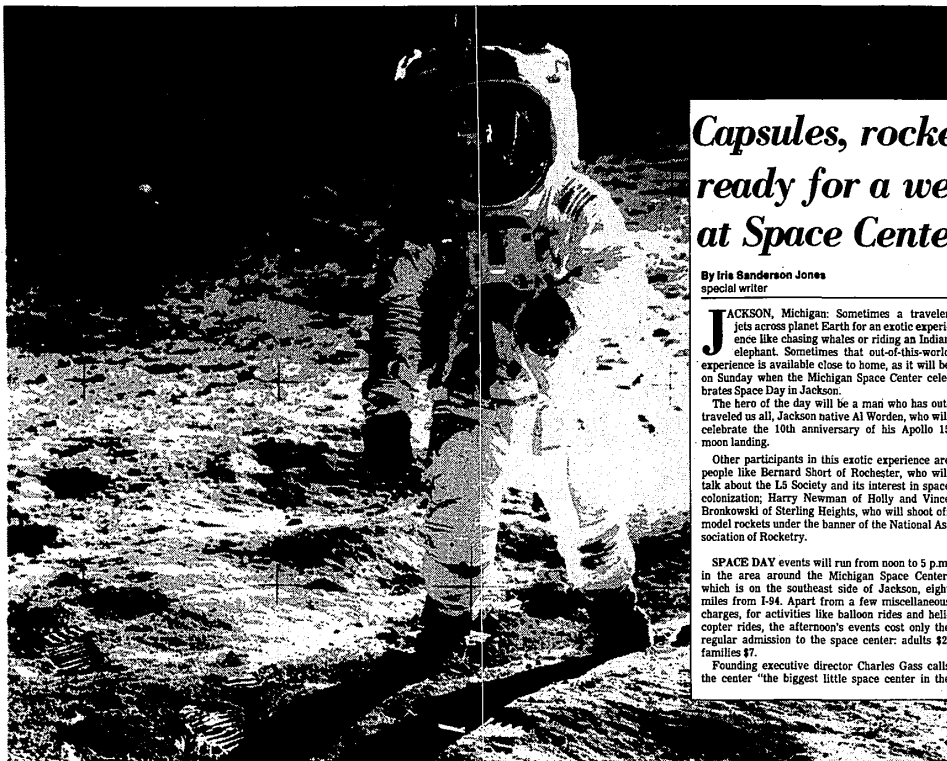


Thursday, July 9, 1991

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Capsules, rockets and shuttle ready for a weekend takeoff at Space Center in Jackson

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

JACKSON, Michigan: Sometimes a traveler jets across planet Earth for an exotic experience like chasing whales or riding an Indian elephant. Sometimes that out-of-this-world experience is available close to home, as it will be on Sunday when the Michigan Space Center celebrates Space Day in Jackson.

The hero of the day will be a man who has out-traveled us all, Jackson native Al Worden, who will celebrate the 10th anniversary of his Apollo 15 moon landing.

Other participants in this exotic experience are people like Bernard Short of Rochester, who will talk about the L5 Society and its interest in space colonization; Harry Newman of Holly and Vince Bronkowski of Sterling Heights, who will shoot off model rockets under the banner of the National Association of Rocketry.

SPACE DAY events will run from noon to 5 p.m. in the area around the Michigan Space Center, which is on the southeast side of Jackson, eight miles from I-94. Apart from a few miscellaneous charges, for activities like balloon rides and helicopter rides, the afternoon's events cost only the regular admission to the space center: adults \$2, families \$7.

Founding executive director Charles Gass calls the center "the biggest little space center in the

world." Gass had a letter from Werner Von Braun in the eighth grade, when he wanted to be an astronaut but learned he was more suited to being an artist.

He was working as an artist for Consumers Power when he entered a contest sponsored by the Jackson Chamber of Commerce; Jackson was home to three astronauts and they wanted a road sign celebrating that connection.

Gass eventually got a space center instead of a sign, and the job of executive director to go with it. He is a walking encyclopedia of space information, and the moving force behind the excellent exhibits in the center.

THE SPIRIT of Michigan children is there from the moment you walk in the door of the 11,800-square-foot geodesic dome, with crayoned drawings and elementary school letters on a bulletin board display nearby.

Flashing lights and astronaut chatter follow you through the transition tunnel to a national treasure, the Apollo 9 space capsule commanded by James A. McDivitt, a graduate of Jackson Community College.

The capsule sits under a giant orange-and-white parachute, one of three that gentled the command module from 17,000 to 17 miles per hour at splash-down in 1969. A tiny model of the LEM sits above the capsule like a relative of R2D2 from the movie Star Wars.

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