



20th Anniversary Statement

CHALLENGER CENTER FOR SPACE SCIENCE EDUCATION 20 YEARS OF INSPIRING, EXPLORING, LEARNING...

January 28, 1986, is a day in history that stands out as one of excitement, tragedy, and remembrance. On that day, *Challenger, 51-L*, the “Teacher in Space” mission, launched into space carrying teacher Christa McAuliffe, Commander Dick Scobee, Pilot Mike Smith and astronauts Judy Resnik, Ellison Onizuka, Greg Jarvis, and Ron McNair. Thousands of school children and citizens were watching with anticipation the launch of this mission that had captured the excitement and awe of the nation only to see a major space tragedy before their eyes. It was truly a sad day in history, but with determination and vision, the *Challenger* families turned this tragedy into a monumental educational opportunity for children and adults alike.

In April of that same year, the families of the late space shuttle *Challenger* crew met in the living room of June Scobee, widow of Commander Dick Scobee, to discuss a memorial for their loved ones. Choosing not to have a monument in stone but rather something that would continue the education that was part of the mission of *51-L*, the families chose to create an educational organization to inspire young people across the nation. Gathering educators, scientists, astronauts, and leaders in business and industry, June and the other family members were able to create Challenger Center for Space Science Education, which became a network of learning centers that uses space as a motivator to inspire students to succeed in mathematics, science, technology, and engineering while giving teachers an opportunity to change the way they teach.

The first Challenger Learning Center was opened in August of 1988 at the Houston Museum of Natural Science under the direction of the *Challenger* families and Astrophysicist Carolyn Sumners, who had taught the astronauts the astronomy of their mission. It was followed shortly afterward with the openings of Challenger Learning Centers in Greenbelt, Maryland; Dayton, Ohio; Tampa, Florida; Richmond, Virginia; and Bridgeport, Connecticut. To date, there are 51 operational centers in the United States, Canada, and England that collectively reach over 500,000 students per year. There are many more Challenger Learning Centers on the horizon. These learning centers have simulations in which students climb aboard a space station and work in teams to solve problems as astronauts and mission controllers in scenarios that take them through a comet, to the surface of the Moon, to a rotating platform to observe Earth, and to Mars. New scenarios are being developed to take education into new realms of excitement, creating tomorrow’s prepared work force. Barbara Bailey, a parent of a child who had been part of the Beta testing at the opening of the first center in Houston said, “My son’s class went through the Challenger Learning Center eight times to test each of the stations. He was so excited that he hung his space vest on his wall through junior high and high

school and then took it with him to put on his wall at Louisiana State University, where he graduated in pre-engineering. I can't thank Challenger Center enough."

Recognized by the United States Department of Education for being a top motivator in mathematics, science, and technology, Challenger Center embraces the National Science Education Standards in each of its missions so that teachers are receiving hands-on, minds-on delivery of concepts that must be taught. Five time astronaut Dr. Norman Thagard is the Associate Dean at FAMU/FSU College of Engineering and Executive Director of the Challenger Learning Center of Tallahassee. He comments, "We built a Challenger Learning Center here to turn kids on to engineering, math, science, and technology because middle school is when they are formulating their future goals. Challenger Center is the tool to spark their desire to become our future engineers." Former Utah Senator and Astronaut Jake Garn states, "The Challenger Center program offers opportunities for young people that will completely change their lives and will change the direction of the nation as those young people become our leaders."

As we begin our historic 20th year, our Learning Centers will honor the crew and commemorate their lives and legacies throughout the year in a myriad of events. While there are literally hundreds of schools, programs, and foundations that have honored the crew and the mission by naming their entities after the *Challenger* and its individual crew members, the cornerstone of Challenger Center is its Challenger Learning Centers. We will open new centers and celebrate those communities who, like the *Challenger* families, came together from diverse backgrounds and experiences to create opportunities to enrich and expand the education of students in a unique and fun approach. Through the establishment of the growing network of Challenger Learning Centers, the mission of the crew truly lives on. Together our Learning Centers touch lives and create opportunities for students, our future leaders, who are the true continuation of the mission of the *Challenger*, 51-L.

As then Vice President George Bush stated in a letter to June Scobee,

"The *Challenger* Seven lived in vibrant pursuit of a dream. As long as we continue to pursue that dream, as long as we help to touch the lives of young people, as long as we help to ensure that America continues to rise to the challenge of the new frontier, then it can be said that we never truly lost those seven brave souls. They will continue to live on with us, and with the hopes and dreams of the nation."

