

Downey Space Center Hosts Visit By Astronaut

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By Wave Staff



Astronaut Jose Hernandez, center, who flew on a space shuttle mission last year, visited the Columbia Memorial Space Center in Downey Monday with Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, left and Downey City Councilman Mario Guerra. Hernandez toured the museum and visited with schoolchildren who are being recruited to serve as volunteers. (Photo by Gary McCarthy)

DOWNEY — About 100 youngsters, potential volunteers at the Columbia Memorial Space Center, turned out Monday to tour the two-story facility and meet astronaut Jose Hernandez.

Also on hand were Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Los Angeles, Assemblyman Hector De La Torre, D-South Gate; and Downey city officials.

Hernandez, a mission specialist on a space shuttle flight last year, chatted with the youngsters and answered questions.

The astronaut, currently assigned to the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, earned a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from the University of the Pacific in 1984 and a master's in electrical and computer engineering from UC Santa Barbara in 1986.

City officials said they seek youth volunteers to help younger visitors learn about space, aviation and robots, as offered at the center, 12400 Columbia Way.

Also part of the promotion of the center, which opened last November, are open houses for teachers 4 to 8 p.m. April 22 and 1 to 5 p.m. April 24.

Officials hope teachers will bring their classes to the facility and that students will become interested in science and space flight.

Offered there are a Mars robot vehicle in the Robotics Lab, the Challenger Space Flight Simulator, toy rocket launchers, information on the solar system, NASA launches and space missions on tape, the chance to make paper airplanes and learning of Downey's history in space flight.

The \$9 million Science Center stands on two acres of the 160-acre former NASA site which was where the nation's spacecrafts were built in the 1960s and '70s.

It is named in honor of the crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia, which exploded on its return to Earth in 2003, killing all those on board.

Regular hours of operation at the center are noon to 6 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. Tickets are \$5 general admission and \$3 each for groups of 10.

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