

SWOSU Trio Attends Impressive Tour of Johnson Space Center

04.18.2008

Three Southwestern Oklahoma State University representatives-including students Henok Ermias and Vicki Abernathy and faculty Madeline Baugher-were part of an Oklahoma delegation that attended a recent tour of the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. The trip was sponsored by the Oklahoma NASA Space Grant Consortium and had reps from eight Oklahoma universities.

Two Southwestern Oklahoma State University students and one faculty member recently toured the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, as part of a trip sponsored by the Oklahoma NASA Space Grant Consortium.

SWOSU students Henok Ermias of Weatherford and Vicki Abernathy of Thomas were accompanied on the trip by Madeline Baugher, principal administrator of the grant at SWOSU. Ermias is a pharmacy major while Abernathy is a computer science major.

Two students from each of the eight different Oklahoma universities in the consortium were accompanied by their school sponsors.

The group visited the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory where they were allowed to view astronaut training. The lab houses a pool holding 6.2 million gallons of water that is 40 foot, 102 feet wide and 202 feet long. The pool contains a full-size mock-up of the International Space Station which allows astronauts to train in conditions that simulate the experience in space.

The next stop on the agenda was the United Space Alliance where students and sponsors viewed how clothes and personal care products are tested and packaged for flights. USA packs items for all missions to the International Space Station, even foreign countries' flights. The rehydrated astronaut food that the group sampled was absolutely delicious, according to Baugher. The students learned how the food is processed, packaged and stored for the space use. USA also custom fits each astronaut's space suits and insures that the suits have been properly repaired after use.

The last day of the trip was spent at the Johnson Space Center. At Building 110, the group boarded the Space Center Bus to travel to the Foreign Language Lab where they learned how important it was for all the astronauts fluently and reliably communicate. The speaker was the Russian language instructor.

At Mission Control the group viewed the personnel supporting the Endeavor shuttle as it was on its way to the International Space Station. The International Space Station also has its own separate Mission Control where NASA professionals monitor all personnel on the station. The group was allowed to visit the historic Mission Control where the Apollo flights were controlled. NASA Flight Director Milt Heflin was the guide on this part of the Space Center tour, and he gave moving historical stories about the exciting Moon missions of the 1960s.

The next stop on the tour was Building #9, where the group was guided through the large building housing the Shuttle Simulator and the International Space Station

Modules. Baugher said the Russian Soyuz that is the primary escape vehicle from the International Space Station was interestingly small.

During the bus ride, the students were driven by Memorial Grove, a planting of trees in honor of astronauts who have perished. Rocket Park has sorted rockets on view and a building containing the Apollo 18 rocket and command module that was never launched into space because of budget cuts.

Baugher said a big thank you goes to Dr. Victoria Duca-Snowden, principal grant administrator for the Oklahoma NASA Space Grant Consortium, and Dr. William James, who planned and made the trip possible.