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## Hometown Boy Flies High

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## EVENTS

ON JUNE 20, 1988, WEATHERFORD, HELD A THOMAS P. STAFFORD DAY. JUDGE AND MRS. JOHN ALLEN PHILLIPS II OF DURANT SPONSORED A WRITING CONTEST FOR EDITOR THOMAS' ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASS. THE FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-PLACE PAPERS ARE PUBLISHED HERE. JUDGING WAS DONE BY THE PHILLIPSES.

First-Place winner, Stafford Day Writing Contest

# HOMETOWN BOY FLIES HIGH

*By Brent Wilks*

In a much-deserved ceremony, Lt. Gen. Thomas P. Stafford was honored by his hometown, Weatherford. The ceremony took place on June 20, 1988, near the Weatherford City Hall. There to honor Stafford were many dignitaries including Weatherford's mayor, Gary Rader, and the two Russian Cosmonauts, Soviet Air Force Major General Aleksey A. Leonov, and Soviet flight engineer Valeriy N. Kubasov, with whom Stafford made history in the summer of 1975.

Although the joint space flight involving the meeting between astronauts and cosmonauts made a historic leap in foreign relations, Stafford has made many other contributions to the space program and has also managed to advance his personal career by co-authoring two instructional books and then being assigned to the Gemini project. Three years after this second Gemini flight, he became the mission commander for the Apollo 10 lunar flight which took place in June 1969. The final Apollo space flight was a rendezvous between a U.S. and a Russian ship to test a mechanism that joined two ships of different design. This was the space flight in which Stafford met the two Russian cosmonauts.

Soviet Air Force Major General Aleksey A. Leonov and Soviet flight engineer Valeriy N. Kubasov were personally invited by Stafford himself, who went to Russia to do so. Other members of the Apollo-Soyuz flight to attend were Stafford's crew—docking module pilot Donald K. Slayton and

command module pilot Vance D. Brand. In addition to these distinguished guests, the creator of the statue, Leonard McMurry, was there.

The statue of Stafford stands thirteen feet tall and shows the subject in the space suit used for the Apollo-Soyuz flight. The bronze statue shows



Here is a lasting tribute to Astronaut and Weatherford native, Lt. General Thomas P. Stafford.

Stafford with his head tilted skyward as if looking forward to his next space flight or to the future of a more brilliant space program, for activities in which he has been honored. Although most honors have been government-issued, another honor that Weatherford has given him was the renaming of Washita Street to Tom Stafford Street on another "Tom Stafford Day" on September 7, 1975. In addition to Tom Stafford Street, Weatherford also displays a Weatherford flag, which Stafford carried on his last space flight.

Stafford's last space flight was not the astronaut's last contribution to the United States. He was promoted to Major General on August 9, 1975, at which time he was appointed commander of the Air Force Flight Test Center. On May 1, 1978, he became Deputy Chief of Staff, Research Development and Acquisition, Headquarters USAF, after being promoted to Lieutenant General on March 15. Lieutenant General Thomas P. Stafford retired from the Air Force on November 1, 1979, but has continued to give expert advice to NASA and some private firms.

Stafford is presently a private technical consultant for the aerospace industrial business, Gibraltar Exploration, Ltd., of Oklahoma City and ranks as Vice President. Thomas P. Stafford started as a small-town boy who followed his dreams into space and paved the way to success. ●

*BRENT WILKS is a sophomore at SOSU with an undecided major. He lives in Clinton and commutes to classes. Brent graduated from Clinton High School in 1988. His hobbies include hunting, restoring old vehicles, and reading.*

## Second-Place winner, Stafford Day Writing Contest

# A SPECIAL DAY

*By Doug Wisel*

Monday, June 20, 1988, was a special day in Weatherford. The town was in a state of excitement because its home-town hero was coming home. Store windows were decorated. Red, white, and blue flags were flying, and the town was swollen with pride. The sun was shining brightly, which added to the festive mood. Weatherford was excited because Lieutenant General Thomas P. Stafford and the two Russian cosmonauts who participated in the Apollo-Soyez flight with him were in town for a homecoming festival and the dedication of a thirteen-foot-high bronze statue of Tom Stafford. A large crowd gathered in the City Hall parking lot where the dedication ceremony would be held. I could feel the excitement build as a trumpeter played "The Star-Spangled Banner." Mayor Gary Rader proclaimed June 20 "Thomas P. Stafford Day" as the crowd waited anxiously for the unveiling of the statue. A loud cheer arose as the crowd waited anxiously for the unveiling of the statue and when the white covering was finally removed from the statue. As the ceremony ended, I saw a variety of reactions. Several people were

reunited with old friends, some took pictures, and others just looked at the statue. The Thomas P. Stafford Day was a special time because it created a wide assortment of thoughts and feelings.

The first impression that I felt during the ceremony was a feeling of patriotism and pride. The ceremony made me proud of the accomplishments that America and her space program have made. It was also evident that the people around me were proud of General Stafford and what he has done for the

Weatherford community. I was reminded that the United States is the greatest nation in the world and that we are truly privileged to live in this great country.

The ceremonies also created feelings of admiration for General Stafford. I could see the admiration in the sparkling eyes of the children who sat near me. I felt admiration for his four space flights and his many other accomplishments. I also felt admiration for the hard work and dedication he had put forth to accomplish what he has done. I



Lt. General Stafford and Weatherford Mayor Gary Rader look on during the unveiling.