



NEWS RELEASE

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Waterford Mott Teacher Sharon Spencer Attends NASA Liftoff Institute

July 12, 2017, Waterford, Mich. – Waterford Mott High School Teacher Sharon Spencer joined educators from across the nation for the LiftOff Summer Institute at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas last month. This program, sponsored by NASA’s Texas Space Grant Consortium, selects teachers from across the U.S. who will increase their knowledge of space education through this professional development summer Institute.

LiftOff is a collaborative effort of Texas Space Grant Consortium members and affiliates, NASA, and industry. Teachers apply for LiftOff and are selected competitively. The workshops are organized around an aerospace or space science theme drawn from NASA’s diverse engineering and scientific research programs.

Opening the weeklong institute was a presentation by Jerry Woodfill, an engineer at NASA Johnson Space Center, who shared thirteen things that saved Apollo XIII. He was the first alert warning system engineer on Apollo XIII. Four astronauts spoke to the educators during the week: Apollo XIII astronaut Fred Haise shared his momentous experience, former Astronaut Clay Anderson shared his message of “Teach Them to Dream” and each teacher received his book “The Ordinary Spaceman”, former Astronaut Jerry Ross shared his experiences as a 7 time space walker while giving each teacher his book “Spacewalker” and accompanying DVD, and former Astronaut Mike Foreman shared stories from his space flight experience.

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With the United States experiencing a total solar eclipse on August 21 of this year, teachers conducted eclipse activities, modeled phases of the moon with Jody Hodges, and participated in Discovery dome activities with Dr. Patricia Reiff of Rice University. A highlight was seeing the James Webb telescope in the chamber preparing for testing. Teachers increased their knowledge of working and living in space while visiting scientists and engineers in the Astromaterials Lab where they viewed the Apollo Moon Rocks, Genesis Lab, Stardust Lab, and CT chamber, Food Lab, Neutral Buoyancy Lab, and Robotics lab. Norm Chaffee walked the teachers through each stage of the Saturn V rocket while Tim Hall, Deputy Chief of Extravehicular Activities at JSC shared NASA's vision of what the future holds.

Spencer will return to her high school in the fall, train other educators, and use new resources received in her classroom. The LiftOff workshops prove that teachers and their students are excited about space science and exploration. The resources will be used to enrich STEM education for students nationwide. The workshops provided teachers the rare – and for most, unique – opportunity to spend a week working with professional scientists and engineers at the cutting edge of space exploration.

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