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Jackie Bell, The Arizona Daily Star

Remembering — Secrist Middle School students turn to watch four A-10s from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base mark the anniversary of space shuttle Challenger's explosion. Secrist teacher Bob Carpenter, a semifinalist in NASA's teacher-astronaut program, arranged yesterday's fly-by as part of the school's "Day of Excellence" to honor the crew.

Shuttle 'lifts off' in tribute to Challenger crew

By Lourdes Medrano
The Arizona Daily Star

Dressed in light blue coveralls with a NASA emblem, the seven-member crew boarded the shuttle Explorer yesterday.

They were to eat, sleep and conduct experiments in the shuttle for 30 hours and land at 1 p.m. today.

They would communicate by computer and printer, video and intercom — but they would never leave their Kino Learning Center classroom.

In fact, the seven astronauts in their elaborate plywood spacecraft were only a few feet away from seven other students operating Mission Control.

2 from N.H. school

Two of the students taking part in the classroom mission — a tribute to the Challenger crew on the anniversary of the real shuttle's explosion — were from Concord (N.H.) High School. Christa McAuliffe, one of the Challenger astronauts, had taught there.

During their mock mission the student crew was to have videotaped experiments involving chromatography, magnetism, effervescence, hydroponics and Newton's law of gravity, said Sister Judy Bisignano, Kino co-administrator and an Arizona finalist for the teacher in space program.

Astronaut Charles D. Walker addressed a large crowd of students, teachers and guests at a candlelight memorial service at the private, alternative-education school at 6625 N. First Ave.

Walker, who works at Douglas Astronautics Co. for the Space Station Program, flew on the Atlantis and Discovery shuttle missions in 1984 and 1985.

"Today is an important day that will never be forgotten," Walker said yesterday.

And he said the danger probably will always exist in any space program.

"The accident was a very hard lesson that will be relearned over and over," he said.

"But they (the Challenger crew) were pioneers. They knew the danger, and they took a risk.... We have learned from that and will continue learning."

As the shuttle was "launched," George Corneveaux, 14, excitedly told the crew from Mission Control: "The tower has been cleared — you look good."

The simulated flight is the 27th since the full-scale mock-up of a shuttle cabin was completed a few months before the Challenger explosion, Bisignano said.

On Jan. 28, 1986, Kino students were watching the Challenger lift off live by satellite when tragedy struck.

Two days later, the students went ahead with a planned simulated flight in memory of the seven astronauts.

"At the time, either the kids took it very hard or they didn't really react to it," Bisignano said.

"Now, their attitude is one of respect."

She said Concord High students Melissa Blackey and Hillary Holloway, both 17, have talked with Kino students about their school and McAuliffe.

Hillary said she watched the Challenger explosion broadcast in one of her school's classrooms.

She immediately thought of McAuliffe, her former economics teacher, she said.

"I couldn't believe it, I thought she and all the others were going to be safe."

A year later, she feels "good that the NASA program is progressing" and that she's taking part in the simulated shuttle flight, Hillary said.

The shuttle project, which Bisignano said is valued at $20,000, is part of the school's science program.



Bruce McClelland, The Arizona Daily Star

Walker autographs a book for Ashley Duncan, Tom Parson and Jacob Schloff