

ROCKET CITY, ALABAMA



In this July 13, 2018 photo, a replica Saturn V rocket can be seen at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala. Inside the neighboring Davidson Center for Space Exploration building, a Saturn V is hung for display in sections for visitors to examine. Huntsville’s tourism industry is rooted in the U.S. space program and its critical, ongoing research into getting astronauts back to the moon and on to Mars.

Space history and an eye on the future

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — The birthplace of NASA’s rockets lies in the land of cotton, hundreds of miles from Cape Canaveral’s launch pads. From the first U.S. satellites and astronauts, to the Apollo moon shots, to the space shuttles and now NASA’s still-in-development Space Launch System, rocket history inundates Huntsville, Alabama.

Huntsville’s nickname, Rocket City, is thanks largely to Wernher von Braun and his team of fellow German-born rocketeers who settled here in the 1950s. The city has long been home to the Army’s Redstone Arsenal and NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center. But now it’s attracting new generations of engineers, scientists and techies. Tourists come for the history. Kids and adults come to learn at Space Camp.

It was von Braun, Marshall’s first director, who wanted to showcase Huntsville’s rocket development and testing. Thus was born the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, an official NASA tourist spot that houses one of only three remaining Saturn V moon rockets, this one a National Historic Landmark.

Von Braun planted the seed for Space Camp as well. Why band camp, football camp and cheer-leading camp, but no science camp, he wondered. He didn’t live long enough to see Space Camp open in 1982 at the rocket center, but since then, 800,000 youngsters and grown-up space fans have attended daylong, weekend or weeklong sessions with space, robotics and aviation themes.

Its address? One Tranquility Base, Huntsville. As in “Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed,” words spoken by astronaut Neil Armstrong when he landed on the moon with Buzz Aldrin. The 50th anniversary of those first moon steps is next July. Huntsville plans to shoot up thousands of little rockets in commemoration.



In this July 13, 2018 photo, visitors tour the Orion modules in the space camp program at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala.

The DNA from America’s original rocket force still permeates Huntsville, according to Deborah Barnhart, the U.S. Space and Rocket Center’s executive director. It’s Alabama’s No. 1 paid tourist attraction, with bus tours into the restricted Redstone and Marshall, and wild rocket-style rides like Space Shot and G-Force Accelerator.

“We’re all space geeks and we love it,” Barnhart said. But Huntsville isn’t just about history. Ongoing research aims to return astronauts to the moon and on to Mars. “We’re looking to the future, really looking to travel in space, trying to figure out the problems of living and working in space,” Barnhart said.

Despite Huntsville’s role, author Homer Hickam, a longtime Huntsville resident who’s now retired from NASA, sees Cape Canaveral, Florida, and Houston getting most of the attention when it comes to space travel. Hickam’s 1998 mem-

oir “Rocket Boys” became the movie “October Sky.” “You look at all this whole great big Saturn V, and the only part

“We’re trying to inspire people in STEM. We’re trying to inspire aviation-oriented people”

Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger

that Houston was responsible for was, I don’t know. This little part right here,” Hickam said, laughing, as he pointed to the capsule at the tip of the 363-foot-long rocket, stretching horizontally in its massive exhibit hall.

German-style beer gardens are hosted beneath the Saturn V

every Thursday evening, spring to fall. Engineers and their families mobbed a recent one. Beverages included T-Minus, a locally made, tangerine-flavored beer. Monkey-naut brew is also a favorite.

“It’s probably the most scientific small town in America,” said retired Apollo program worker Billy Neal, a volunteer docent who shed his white lab coat for that night’s Biergarten.

Miss Baker, the squirrel monkey who preceded Mercury astronauts into space in 1959, is buried at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. Space Campers sometimes leave bananas at her tombstone.

Nearly 1,000 campers from around the globe swarmed the rocket center during a typical week this summer. They launched small rockets and got the feel of walking in space while dangling from the ceiling in harnesses or scuba diving in a water tank smaller but similar to what astronauts once used for practice. They were strapped



Meredith Dixon points out interesting visuals to her daughter Birdie, a space camp participant, as they listen to a talk on space flight from NASA astronaut Dottie Metcalf, at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala.

into a mock cockpit coming in for a Mars landing and sat behind computers as flight controllers for the Mars mission. They even live in dormitories that look as though they belong on the moon or Mars.

Camp counselors — called crew trainers — are mostly university students or recent graduates in STEM fields — science, technology, engineering or math.

In July, campers got to meet the first Space Camp graduate to actually launch into space, Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger. She attended a Space Academy for older students the same month that shuttle Discovery delivered the Hubble Space Telescope to orbit in 1990. She went on to fly aboard Discovery in 2010 as a NASA astronaut-educator.

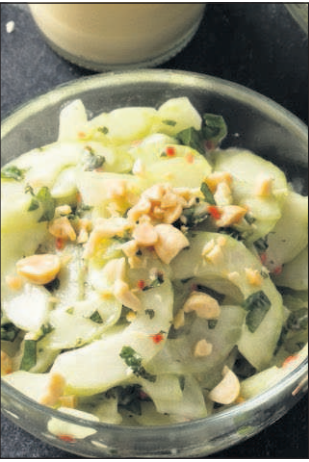
Space Camp’s simulations are “as realistic as they can be for what’s done in a week,” she said. “We can’t train kids on a whole bunch of switches and circuit breakers and systems, but we can give them the big idea.”

Her goal is to help campers “see that what they were doing this week isn’t so very different than what we did in the program and how it prepares you for real space ... and then also to hopefully impart some things like all of us are going to go through rough times, but there are ways to stay plugged in.”

AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

Creamy roasted garlic pairs deftly with crunchy cucumbers

Crisp, crunchy and cool, this salad offers complexity with little effort. Creamy Roasted Garlic and Miso Dressing provided savory notes of umami and mellow sweetness. To avoid watering down the salad, we drained the sliced cucumbers on paper towels for a few minutes. Generous handfuls of fresh mint and basil brought layers of herbal flavor. Crunchy chopped peanuts played off the nuttiness of the dressing beautifully and offered great textural contrast. Spicy Thai chilies brought all the flavors into focus and ensured that the rich dressing didn’t make the salad feel too heavy. Be sure to slice the cucumbers



Cucumber salad with creamy roasted garlic dressing.

1/8 to 3/16 inch thick. This salad is best served within 1 hour of being dressed.

Creamy Roasted Garlic Dressing:

Makes about 1 cup
Start to finish: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Pair this dressing with sturdy greens. You will need about 2 tablespoons of dressing per 2 cups of greens.
3 large garlic heads (3 ounces each), outer papery skins removed and top third of head cut off and discarded
1/4 cup white wine vinegar
3 tablespoons water
2 teaspoons honey
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
Salt and pepper
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 F. Wrap garlic in aluminum foil and roast until golden brown and very tender, 1 to 1 1/4 hours. Remove garlic from oven and carefully open foil packets. When garlic is cool enough to handle, squeeze cloves from skins (you should have about 6 tablespoons); discard skins. Process garlic, vinegar, water, honey, mustard, thyme, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in blender until smooth, about 45 seconds, scraping down sides of blender jar as needed. With blender running, slowly add oil until incorporated, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. (Dressing can be refrigerated for up to 1 week; whisk to recombine before using.)

Creamy Roasted Garlic and Miso Dressing:
Omit thyme and pepper. Substitute rice vinegar for white wine vinegar, 1 tablespoon white miso for mustard, and vegetable oil for olive oil.

CUCUMBER SALAD WITH CREAMY ROASTED GARLIC DRESSING (OR A MISO ONE)

Servings: 4-6
Start to finish: 25 minutes

4 cucumbers, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and sliced very thin
3/4 cup of Creamy Roasted Garlic and Miso Dressing (recipe follows)
2 Thai chilies, stemmed, seeded, and minced
1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
Salt
1/4 cup unsalted dry-roasted peanuts, chopped coarse (optional)

Spread cucumber slices evenly over paper towel-lined baking sheet and let drain for 15 minutes. Gently toss cucumbers with dressing, chilies, mint, and basil in large bowl until evenly coated. Let salad sit for 5 minutes, then toss again. Season with salt to taste. Sprinkle with peanuts, if using, and serve immediately.