

# The end of one era, the beginning of another

NASA ends its manned space program after 30 years

BY LILLIAN M. ORTIZ  
OF THE MONTCLAIR TIMES

Is it really over?

Thirteen days after Atlantis launched into our orbit, the shuttle was expected to land back on Earth early this morning. Its mission – the 135th in NASA's Space Shuttle Program – was to deliver supplies to the International Space Station. It marked the end of the 30-year manned space program.

Coincidentally enough, the landing of Atlantis comes one day after the 42nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission where man landed and took his first steps on the moon.

"That's really still the crowning achievement of manned space exploration," said Montclair resident Charles Liu, an associate at the Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York. "It's kind of unfortunate. The greatest achievement happened 40 years ago."

Even though the Apollo 11 mission occurred years before the Space Shuttle Program officially began, Liu doesn't view the program in a negative light. In fact, he and others are quite fond of the program and how it inspired generations.

Take, for example, Montclair State University math professor Patricia J. D'Emidio. At one time, D'Emidio was inspired to become an astronaut. "But I get dizzy on a roller coaster," she told The Times. Little did she know that she would have two personal connections to the Space Shuttle Program. Those connections allowed D'Emidio to witness not one, but four shuttle launches and a landing.

How'd it happen? Back when D'Emidio was a geometry teacher at Mountain High School in West Orange (now West Orange High School), she taught Mark E. and Scott J. Kelly, who are now well-known NASA astronauts.

D'Emidio, who also served as the brothers' swim coach, didn't realize the impression she made on Mark and Scott until almost two decades later.

"It was very nice of them, after 19 years, to remember me and invite me [to a launch]. I got to know them again and their families ... It's kind of cool," D'Emidio said. "The coolest thing was a personal email from space from Scott."

D'Emidio recalled her first launch – STS-103 – in 1999, a Discovery shuttle mission. She watched from a small private area at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, two to three miles away from the shuttle, along with some of the astronauts' family members. She remembers the shuttle commander and pilot speaking over the intercom, allowing everyone to understand exactly what was happening. A familiar voice was on the other end of that intercom. It was Scott, who was piloting his first mission. She recalled a countdown clock ticking away, as the moment of launch grew closer and closer. Finally it was time for liftoff.

As the ground started to rumble, D'Emidio excitedly watched as the shuttle, and her former student, rose into the sky, traveling faster than the speed of sound.

"[The shuttle] is in the air before you even hear it," she said, referring to the incredibly loud sound of a sonic boom.

Tim Lynch, a physics and astronomy teacher at The Montclair Kimberley Academy, knows the booming sound well. He, too, witnessed the Discovery shuttle launch into orbit. "It was so loud



AP/NASA

In this Sunday, July 10, photo provided by NASA, the space shuttle Atlantis is seen over the Bahamas prior to docking with the International Space Station. Part of a Russian Progress spacecraft, which is docked to station, is in the foreground.

that you could feel it," Lynch said as he recalled the sonic boom of STS-131 in April 2010.

For Lynch, whose wife surprised him with tickets to the launch, "It was the best birthday present ever."

The Montclair High School alumnus almost missed watching the shuttle roar into orbit after several delays. But thankfully for Lynch, things worked out.

"It was breathtaking," he recalled. "Just the smoke patterns were really neat. You think seeing shapes in the clouds is interesting. This was pretty amazing."

Looking back at the shuttle program, Lynch believes it served as "an incredible inspiration," but it also was a lesson in how nature cannot be fooled. That topic was the focus of a talk Lynch gave to the entire MKA upper school on the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the Challenger tragedy, when seven crew members died after their shuttle broke apart just 73 seconds after launch.

The point I made to them was that it's very, very easy ... to listen to the answers we want to hear and find a way to dismiss the ones that are challenging us. We all do this. It's very human, but it can kill," he said, citing the concerns raised by engineers of the Challenger shuttle that were ignored. Challenger wasn't the only tragedy in the space shuttle program. The Columbia shuttle and its seven crew members perished in 2003 during re-entry.

"I do feel it [shuttle program] was important," said Lynch, who is a member of the New Jersey Astronomical Society.

"I don't feel it was necessarily important as a scientific endeavor, but I think it shouldn't be thought of solely as a scientific effort.

Astronomy has made enormous advances in the last 20 years, but none of that was due to manned space flight. The science has been done by unmanned probes," he said, referring to missions like the Mars Exploration Rover, Cassini and the Hubble Space Telescope.

For Liu, who also teaches astrophysics for the City University of New York, those unmanned missions have generated great scientific discovery and has proven that "we can make amazing discoveries without sending man into space."

However, he adds that "a manned program has a unique capacity to capture the mind of young people. I do think a manned program is important in the long run."

"I don't have anything negative to say about the shuttle program itself. It was a really great success. But it really is time. I don't see any 30-year-old cars on the road anymore," Liu said. "It's time for something else."

#### SO WHAT'S NEXT?

Without a shuttle, NASA is relying on the Russian Space Agency to fly astronauts into Earth's orbit. It would cost about \$63 million to send one U.S. astronaut on a Russian shuttle.

According to updates on its website, [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov), NASA is working on a way to send humans out into the solar system with the goal of "landing humans on Mars."

But that seems very far off as there isn't yet a replacement for the shuttle. That doesn't surprise Liu, who said this isn't the first time that NASA has ended a program without having another ready to go.

In the 1970s, NASA launched Skylab, America's first experimental space station. "It was because of the delay [of not having a shuttle ready to go] that we lost Skylab," Liu said, explaining that the station lost its orbit and disintegrated upon re-entering our atmosphere. "I can't express surprise that we aren't ready this time."

But both Liu and Lynch believe that the United States can send man back into space within 10 years, if NASA and private companies really want to make it happen.

"I think the future is very bright. The space shuttle program has proven to us all that going up into orbit and back again is very feasible," Liu said.

Lynch agreed. "If we wanted to, if we wanted to commit the resources ... we could have people on Mars, I think. It's a question (of) if we have the resources, do we want to commit them ... and are we interested," he said. "We have spent the entire history of humanity with all our eggs in one basket called Earth. For most of humanity, we haven't had a choice. We do have a choice now."

D'Emidio hopes that NASA

## Facts on the shuttle program

**The space shuttle**, officially called the Space Transportation System (STS), began its flight career with Columbia on April 12, 1981.

**Enterprise** was the first shuttle, although it never flew in space.

**Each shuttle** – Columbia, Challenger, Discovery, Endeavor and Atlantis – is named after influential ships of science and exploration.

**Total crew** – 852 (including STS-135, the last mission)

**Total miles traveled** – 53,114,016 through 134 flights

**The life** of the shuttle program has cost \$113.7 billion. (Not adjusted for inflation)

**Where will the shuttle go?** Shuttle Enterprise will move to the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York. The Udvar-Hazy Center will become the new home for shuttle Discovery. Shuttle Endeavor will go to the California Science Center in Los Angeles. Shuttle Atlantis will be displayed at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor's Complex in Florida.

Information courtesy of NASA.gov.

doesn't rely too much on other countries and creates a new sort of shuttle to take our astronauts farther than they've ever gone before. After all, the moon is still the farthest man has gone.

The future is uncertain, she said, but, "My big hope is that we don't give it up."

## Christie gives medical marijuana law green light

BY TANYA DROBNESS  
OF THE MONTCLAIR TIMES

Gov. Chris Christie has told the state health department to implement New Jersey's medical marijuana program, even though he has not received assurances from federal officials that dispensary operators or state employees would be immune from prosecution.

Christie, a former U.S. Attorney, said he is willing to take the risk.

Aiding his decision was a letter from Deputy U.S. Attorney James Cole, reading March 2008 remarks from then-candidate Barack Obama, and his own experience in law enforcement.

"I'm taking that risk because I believe that the need to provide

compassionate pain relief to these citizens of our state outweighs the risk that we are taking in moving forward with the program as it is set up," Christie said, according to a transcript of a press conference held this past Tuesday.

The program is geared to be "very narrow and medically based," he said.

In March, the state Department of Health and Senior Services announced that a nonprofit corporation based in Montclair, Greenleaf Compassion Center, was one of six organizations in New Jersey selected to operate "alternative treatment centers" and permitted to grow and sell medical marijuana.

On its Facebook page, Greenleaf Compassion Center calls itself

a "nonprofit cannabis dispensary" that will "provide safe and affordable access to medical marijuana for qualifying NJ residents."

The center's operators could not be reached or were not available for comment. Where they plan to open their facility is unknown.

Other organizations awarded the licenses include Breakwater Alternative Treatment Center Corp., with offices in Ocean, and Foundation Harmony, with offices in Cliffside Park, according to Donna Leusner, director of Communications for the state Department of Health and Senior Services. Those groups' locations may have changed.

The New Jersey Compassionate

Use of Medical Marijuana Act was signed into law on Jan. 18, 2010.

The penalties for sharing or giving away the marijuana include arrest and criminal prosecution, officials have stated.

To qualify to obtain the marijuana, patients must meet certain requirements, like having a debilitating medical condition such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple sclerosis, or cancer.

Rozeanne Scotti, New Jersey director of the Drug Policy Alliance, stated: "We are absolutely thrilled that the governor has decided to move forward with the program and we hope that officials in other states who are contemplating options for their programs will follow New Jersey's lead."

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