

# OSU/NASA Education Projects: Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP) Archive

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

## A Wealth of Memories by Minot Parker. Written 2001.

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by Minot Parker

I joined the Spacemobile program in July of 1965 under a contract with Unitec Corp. of Timonium, Maryland. There were quite a few hard feelings among the existing Spacemobilers at that time, as Unitec had told the existing people that if they wanted to stay with the program they would have to take at least a 10% pay cut. Many of the group left. Unitec was not an educational organization. They had primarily been in the business of painting Radomes for the Air Force. They knew the required number of bodies for NASA. Many were chosen but did not stay very long.

All that aside; the Spacemobile program was the second best job on earth and I feel very fortunate to have participated for 35 years. Initially my assignment was at the Electronics Research Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There were nine specialists for a seven state region of New England and New York. We traveled with two people in the van and did two school visits a day. Rarely did we do any class visits. Summers were very busy with activity oriented workshops of one or two week duration. Unless it was a CAP workshop, the specialist(s) conducted the entire program with the local coordinator arranging facilities and organizing the groups. This was a very exciting time as there was much unknown about space travel and the U.S. was planning to "land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth before the end of the decade." The Gemini program was in full swing, the first flyby of Mars occurred in July of '65, there were Earth orbiting satellites of many kinds being launched frequently: OGO, POGO, OAO, OSO, TIROS, Syncom, Pioneers, Ranger, Polar Orbiter, Surveyor, Nimbus. Astronauts were heros. Money was not a significant problem.

The CEPO at ERC was Hy Haggett, who is an unforgettable character and he was assisted by Ray Corey who departed for KSC just before ERC was closed in '69. My first full school program was in September of '65 at St. Michael's High School in Brattleboro, Vermont. I was in training with Art Maynard who left the program in fall '66 to become the planetarium director at West Islip, New York. The members of the early ERC group went on to very responsible positions in education (John Baldarasso, Art Maynard, Jack Nagle, Dave Woods (IBM), Bill Kral, Frank Lucarelli, Dan Roberts, Ray Corey, and Al Morin). Subsequent members of the ERC group included Dennis McLaughlin, Frank McCarthy, Gene Serfass, Louis DelaVina, and Pat Walch.

My very first international Spacemobile conference was held in downtown Baltimore, in the Lord Fox Hotel. What an experience East Baltimore Street was for a country boy from New England. At that conference there was a very famous poker game (I was not a poker player at the time). Five card stud, Jacks or better to open, trips to win. In that game if you drop out of a hand you are out for good and the pot just builds. Finally there were two players left: Frank Lucarelli and Billy Van Orden. Neither had any money left and they split the pot of about \$600. Ask Jack Bannister if you want more details.

Per Diem at that time was \$16 per day, with no receipts. We stayed at a hotel in New York City just off Times Square for about \$27 per week. We didn't know what high per diem was!

Unitec held the national contract for just one year and then NASA went to regional contracts. The ERC contract went to Northeastern University in Boston. They did little management other than processing money. After one year NASA changed contractors again. This time the ERC contract went to the University of New Hampshire, who held it for two years and had four people for the seven state region. When NASA decided to go back to one national contract in '69 the successful bidder was Oklahoma State University. Hy Haggett arranged with Dr. Wiggins to hire me for the salary of \$9600. I was on vacation in Nova Scotia and out of communication. Shortly after that when ERC closed the education responsibility was transferred to GSFC under Elva Bailey. Part of the agreement that Elva worked out was that GSFC would give up West Virginia. Wow! Goddard has a cadre of the old timers (Bannister and Aaronson) which meant that I was the new kid on the block. The group at Goddard was a great group to work with, and I think we were very effective.

What made the Spacemobile program such a great job? The opportunity to generate excitement in students is something that not many people experience. To know immediately that you have done a good job, and may be invited back in a few years. The opportunity to meet and interact with people who are excited about their work and many of whom are world renowned in their field.

Outside of war or crisis, the space program is about the only thing that I can think of that has brought the peoples of the United States together for a common cause as well as the rest of the world, as with the Apollo program. To be involved with an agency that is generally looked up to and held in high regard world wide is an honor.

The AESP program, I believe, has made a difference in the lives of students in all kinds of settings, in the minds of teachers, and the population as a whole.