

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

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Never Dull by Jim Poindexter. Written 2001.

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By Jim Poindexter

When I came on board with Spacemobile, there were two men on each unit. I started during the summer of '66. My first tour was with Ward Taylor. We did teacher workshops and special groups. After the summer I returned to the classroom in Albuquerque where I was teaching science. I didn't like the travel schedule and the one man per unit plan. The contractor, Unitec, called me in October and the rest is per diem.

When the program was started the emphasis was on mass information by the way of student assemblies. Now the emphasis seems to be teacher education and science more than aerospace.

I was always proud of our team at JSC, and tried to keep material and updates to them ASAP. I think each Center Director, when he or she knew of the Spacemobile, was supportive. There were times when the NASA budget was so lean we almost lost the program. However, I feel if it were not for the Spacemobile, Congress would have slashed more from the NASA budget. I spoke those words to the wheels at JSC during the hard times.

My first trip to Washington was a blast. It was my first flight on a commercial jet. I will never forget our landing at Baltimore. We made two landings in one approach. I was really concerned. Since then, I have owned two airplanes and made several touchdowns on one final. Just ask the guys who flew with me to Kitty Hawk and other great landings.

I was an AESPer from '66 to '75. I became a GS and retired four years ago. Thanks to all the hassle from all points, I now have therapy twice a week. When the weather is good enough for 18 holes! I play with about 60 old farts on Tuesdays and some nice guys on Thursdays. We play senior rules and carry a 10 handicap.

One incident took place in South Dakota I will never forget.

Tom Hill was doing a program to a high school audience in a small gym. The typical set-up was on one side with the students in the bleachers. I suppose there were ten or so rows. Maybe fifteen. I was in the audience with the State Science coordinator from SD. There was another special guest and he was taking notes and wasn't very discreet. Every few minutes he would move a little closer to the tables and finally he stood up and moved to the end of the tables, very close to Tom. He continued taking notes and I'm sure everyone knew what he was doing. He made sure of that by his actions. All at once Tom said, "I see we have a guest from Houston who wants to speak to you." Tom handed him the mic and walked away. I almost fell out of the bleachers and have to leave the building I was laughing so hard. I don't recall if I returned to the assembly. I'm sure any ex-spacemobile guy would not turn down a chance with a live mic and audience.

There was one incident when the FBI called me and wanted to know how lunar samples turned up in Wisconsin without any security whatsoever. They turned out to be the genuine fakes in the plastic domes we used until we got the real ones. I was

the one who suggested we get real lunar samples. The wheels laughed. Oh yes, back to the FBI. Someone had bought these fakes at a surplus government sale in the DC area.

There was another event that involved the lunar sample program. A teacher called from Kansas and wanted some information on the samples he had. The person assigned to keeping records, I think it was Peggy Nelson, had no record of samples in Kansas on that date. After much discussion and investigating it was learned that some teachers had encased some slag and passed them off as the Real Deal. They really did a nice job of fooling Rodney. Rodney is dead now and he gave a nice program. It was all the down time that was his problem.

This is for Elva Bailey and his great support!! When we were first allowed to loan lunar samples I agreed to be the scapegoat. JSC was responsible for all of the details such as security, length of time, certification of teachers, etc. I thought we would only be mailing to the JSC 8-state area. As it turned out we were the distribution point for the entire nation and overseas. We needed help, and I brought this up at a national conference. Elva, Bless him, pitched a bitch. He said it was our idea and we had the samples so go ahead and handle the certifications and the security. I don't recall how the changes occurred, but Elva discovered he could get teachers to come to Goddard for the certification and he even got me on the phone to answer any questions during the sessions. At the peak of the interest and utilization of the lunar samples, you couldn't take them away from Goddard. I miss those good times!

Finally, I haven't used a compute or a word 1 since I retired, so forgive the rambling. I really can't separate Spacemobile from being a CEPO or specialist. I felt we had one job. That was to inform the public about NASA's programs. Aerospace Education was what we were about. Thanks to Ken Wiggins, Mary, and all the specialists. I feel very lucky to have had a great ride.