



Perris News

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March Field Museum Vies for Space Shuttle

NASA is retiring its fleet of Space Shuttles and Perris is leading the Inland Region's attempt to bring one of the orbiters to Riverside County.

The March Joint Powers Commission recently took the first step to locating a Space Shuttle at the March Field Air Museum, just north of Perris.

The commission unanimously approved a resolution stating its interest in acquiring one of three orbiters expected to become available after the shuttle program ends in 2010.



[See the JPA Resolution](#)

"Acquiring one of the Orbiters to be displayed at the March Field Air Museum would be a tremendous benefit to the West Coast and the region," the resolution states. "Displaying the flown Space Shuttle Orbiter in a climate-controlled indoor environment would be consistent with the March Field Air Museum's goals of celebrating and preserving aviation history and inspiring current and future generations."

Previously, the March commission approved a \$50,000 donation to help the March museum complete its education hangar, a must if shuttles Discovery, Endeavor or Atlantis will eventually end up there.

The Perris City Council approved its own resolution in support of bringing the shuttle to March. "The timing is perfect," said Mark Yarbrough, a Perris City Councilman and current chairman of the March Joint Powers Commission. "The West Coast has always supported cutting-edge technology and the aerospace industry from its earliest days."

Yarbrough noted that NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena has played a key role in the country's efforts to explore the moon, planets and stars.

Several shuttle missions ended at Edwards Air Force Base near Los Angeles and March Air Reserve Base has a runway long enough to accommodate the shuttle if a dire emergency. A new school in the Val Verde Unified School District is named in honor of the shuttle Columbia, which was lost in 2003.

"In a very real sense, the Space Shuttle was born here and has flown here," Yarbrough said. "To continue its legacy by having an orbiter at the March museum is most appropriate." NASA already has designated one shuttle orbiter for display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. The space agency is soliciting "requests for information" from other space and science museums and educational centers.

Sites chosen to receive an orbiter must be able to properly display it and are responsible for transportation costs, which could total millions.

The March museum would have to build a new hangar for the shuttle.

The museum and the March Joint Powers Authority will work with regional officials, legislative representatives and school administrators to gain additional support and monetary contributions for the shuttle display. The Joint Powers Authority is the agency responsible for redeveloping portions of the former March Air Force Base after it was downsized to a Reserve facility in the mid-1990s. The Joint Powers Commission oversees the JPA and is made up of elected officials from Perris, Moreno Valley, Riverside and Riverside County.

Museum director Patricia Korzec said obtaining a shuttle orbiter would take the March Field Air Museum "to a whole new level" and help promote Perris and surrounding communities as destination spots for regional and out-of-state visitors. The museum already is home to an SR-71 "Blackbird" spy plane, an aircraft that helped spawn the space shuttle program.

"Having the SR-71 open s up other possibilities," Korzec said.

Landing a shuttle orbiter also would make the museum more attractive as an education center, she said.

But the task will not be easy. About 16 other museums are thought to be in the running for a shuttle orbiter, including Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Museum in Dayton, Ohio, and the Seattle Air and Space Museum. But there are advantages to flying under the radar, she said. A small museum in the Midwest outdueled the major museums and obtained an SR-71 simulator last year.

Other backers say the like the March museum's chances too.

Jamil Dada, president of the March Field Museum and chairman of the Riverside County Workforce Development Board, said Southern California is home to 21 million people and millions of military veterans who would come to see and marvel at a shuttle orbiter. When the current economic slowdown ends, the region will be poised to rebound quickly, Dada said, and will attract new business and residents.

"The potential is awesome," he said. "Leadership from Perris is crucial, we are receiving it and it will help us in our efforts to obtain a shuttle orbiter."



March Field Air Museum board member Jamil Dada (left), director Patricia Korzec and Perris City Councilmember Mark Yarbrough stand in front of an SR-71 "Blackbird" spy plane. The trio are working to bring a space shuttle orbiter to the museum.



A photo of the space shuttle Endeavor. The March Field Air Museum and the March Joint Powers Authority are working to bring a retired orbiter to the March museum.



Columbia Elementary School in Mead Valley is named in honor of the space shuttle.

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