



Perris News

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March Field Air Museum Presents Space Shuttle Plan to Buzz Aldrin

Perris officials and members of the March Joint Powers Authority recently presented their plan to bring a space shuttle orbiter to Riverside County to a man who flew into outer space and walked on the moon.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough and Lori Stone, executive director of the Joint Powers Authority recently met former Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin and hand-carried their detailed proposal to land an orbiter at the March Field Air Museum when the space shuttle program is scheduled to expire in 2010.

Yarbrough serves as chairman of the March Joint Powers Commission, which is comprised of elected representatives and sets policy for the JPA.

Aldrin, 79, became the second man to walk on the lunar surface in July 1969 and remains a staunch advocate of American leadership in space.

He came to Riverside last week as keynote speaker for the Science and Technology Education Partnership, which strives to get elementary and high school students interested in science and math.

"Buzz Aldrin is a true American hero, an icon of space exploration and a man who recognizes the importance of educating the next generation of children to take the lead in developing the technology that will take us to the stars," Yarbrough said. "To meet him is a great honor and to let him know of our plans to bring a space shuttle to the March museum is exciting beyond words."

Backers of the space-shuttle-to-the-March museum point out that the facility, located on former Air Force property now owned by the Joint Powers Authority, lies in the heart of Southern California, with its numerous, high-profile aeronautics companies.

The adjacent runway at March Air Reserve would allow a shuttle orbiter to touch down within site of the museum without causing any freeway traffic congestion or delays. The March museum already is home to more than 70 vintage aircraft dating from World War I. And the museum lies along the I-215 corridor near Perris, a stretch of road home to more than a dozen hospitals, colleges and universities.

Aldrin, who lives in California, was part of the Apollo 11 team that traversed the lunar surface when reaching the moon was not only a milestone for NASA but an important fight in the Cold War. He said he would study the proposal presented by Yarbrough and Stone, adding he favored bringing a shuttle orbiter to the March museum "because I live in California."

"It's a great opportunity," he said.

In his remarks to about 500 people at the Riverside Convention Center, Aldrin said the U.S. should not be satisfied with a return trip to the moon. He urged a trip to Mars or one of its two satellites, which would serve as an outpost for human colonization. He said the U.S. should target that mission for 2035—66 years after landing on the moon.

That's the same period from the first powered flight in 1903 to the first moon mission.

The March Field Air Museum faces stiff competition in its efforts to land one of the three surviving operational orbiters. One likely will go to the Smithsonian Institute while space museums in Florida, Texas, Washington and California and elsewhere vie for the others.

Information submitted to the government by March Field Air Museum and JPA representatives indicates the museum is ready to undertake a major building effort should it receive an orbiter. That includes construction of a new hangar to house the orbiter and a walkway that gives visitors the feel they are walking in space.

The museum also would build interactive exhibits and provides teachers with lesson plans to help students fully appreciate the space shuttle and America's quest in space.

Yarbrough said the shuttle would bring hundreds of thousands of visitors and millions of dollars in revenue to Perris and surrounding communities.

"It would help make the region a must-see stop for any vacation in California," he said.



Yarbrough and Aldrin discuss the shuttle program during a private moment.



Aldrin accepts an award following his remarks to the Science and Technology Education Partnership, which was created to encourage students to study math and science courses.



Mark Yarbrough presents former astronaut Buzz Aldrin the proposal to bring a space shuttle orbiter to the March Field Air Museum, just north of Perris.