

Star Guide: Challenger Learning Center of Northern Nevada

By Tony Berendsen

When I was growing up astronauts were my heroes. I'm one of the younglings of the 1960's era that woke up early before school to listen to Walter Cronkite announce the launch of Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo missions. Then filled with the sense of adventure and discovery, I hurried off to more down to earth things, like reading writing, and arithmetic.

Today our manned space program is still alive. Astronauts ride enormous rocket ships to live and work on the International Space Station. NASA is building the SLS (Space Launch System) to send the Orion space craft aloft to new destinations beyond the moon, and commercial companies like SpaceX and Orbital Science are coming close to offering service to low Earth orbit and maybe beyond.

The real life spaceflight adventures I watched as a youth were inspiring, but they were very dangerous. We lost three astronauts on the pad at Cape Canaveral, and two Space Shuttle crews. But still the passion and interest in space continued to inspire. And, from the depth of mortal tragedy of one of the Space Shuttle missions named Challenger, a new ground based space mission began in Reno in October 2014: CLCNN (The Challenger Learning Center of Northern Nevada).



Reno's Challenger Learning Center opened in 2014.
Photo/Challenger Learning Center

Exciting news, the CLCNN is moving to the National Automobile Museum on Lake Street in Reno.

I asked Melodi Rodrigue, president of the CLCNN, how the idea of a Northern Nevada Challenger Learning Center began: "Paul McFarlane, current flight director of the CLCNN, had taken a couple of his high school classes from Hug High to the Challenger Learning Center in Sacramento and the students loved it. On one of the visits, some of the students asked why there wasn't a Challenger Center in Reno. Paul said, 'That's a good question!' and off we went. The CLCNN was formed about eight years ago as a nonprofit and has worked ever since to bring the CLC experience to our community".

If you visit the CLCNN at the Automobile Museum, be prepared for an imaginative team building experience incorporating experiential learning into an exciting space mission. "The current mission takes place in 2076, 100 years after the first Viking lander on Mars; a time when manned missions to Mars are routine. The Mars Control Team is charged with the selection of entry and departure trajectories before landing the Mars Transport Vehicle on Mars with a replacement crew. The crew of the Mars Transport Vehicle is tasked with launching probes targeted at the Martian moons," said Teddy Rodrigue, intern flight director, about the current mission students take part

in at the CLCNN.

McFarlane reflected on the impact of the CLC experience, “It’s always exciting to meet alumni from Challenger Center missions who are now teachers, doctors and scientists who credit Challenger Center for launching them on their career paths. I’ve personally had the honor of speaking with young women who served on our Mars missions locally and around the country who are now studying aerospace engineering in college, while others are actually working for NASA in science positions and at Mission Control.”

CLCNN is a nonprofit, and even though it is affiliated with NASA and use NASA approved programing, it is not financially supported by NASA. Challenger centers depend on their communities and school districts for financial support. Business and private donations really make a big difference in funding operational costs. If you would like to make a donation go **online**, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on “Support the Mission”.

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