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Tri-County Area journalist covers ULA launch thanks to NASA

A mockingbird, the Florida state bird, sits atop a sign in the parking lot of the Astronaut Training Experience (ATX) building early Tuesday morning (April 18). The ATX is serving as a temporary credentialing site for media due to the normal location undergoing work.

Story and Photos
By Jeff M. Hardison © April 21, 2017 at 4:57 p.m.

CAPE CANAVERAL – Coverage by HardisonInk.com of the launch of an Atlas V rocket on Tuesday morning (April 18) from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station is thanks to the professional courtesy extended to the daily news website by the National Aeronautics Space Administration.

The ATX building

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A moon shot is seen from the parking lot of the ATX on Tuesday.

Part of the NASA News complex.

Among the veteran Florida journalists covering this momentous occasion on Tuesday was one from the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties.

Jeff M. Hardison, a native of St. Petersburg, a University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications graduate, and a multiple award-winning weekly and daily Florida journalist who met his wife of almost 30 years when they both lived on the Space Coast, said he was glad to see he was accepted to cover the event.

"I had a blast," he said. "I hope Americans understand the importance of endorsing space exploration and the advancement of scientific research for the benefit of humanity, as we join in peace with our friends from other countries."

Continuing with a theme of launching into its seventh year, HardisonInk.com was among the media outlets credentialed to cover the Orbital ATK CRS-7 Launch on Tuesday.

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Go to top of April Page for video link

In this video, there is the countdown from nine to launch. This view is with zero magnification. The clip then goes to a view of the launch from Cocoa Beach with zero magnification.

Videos by Jeff and Sharon Hardison © April 21, 2017

This launch is named the S.S. John Glenn OA-7 Cargo Delivery Mission to the International Space Station in honor of the late John Herschel Glenn Jr.

Viewers of this launch who were positioned at many points around the area saw the light from the rocket engines and they then heard the sound of the rocket engine.

As the rocket climbed into the sky, the delay from soundwaves of its travel seemed even more peculiar than when a jet passes across the sky seen ahead of where it is "heard" to be in the sky. Light is so much faster than soundwaves that even over a few miles the delayed synchronicity can be noticed.

The roar of the engines from the raw power put forth by the Atlas V rocket provides an unimitable set of moments of excitement for viewers and listeners for many miles away from the site.

Even people farther downrange from the launch were awestruck by the vertical flying machine on Tuesday.

The VAB as seen from the NASA News Center parking lot.

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The VAB as seen from the causeway.

PRE-LAUNCH FUN

"Jeff M. Hardison, Your request submitted on 3/3/2017 has been Approved."

This was the email that put into action everything required for HardisonInk.com to cover the launch of an Atlas V rocket. A room was reserved at a place in the City of Cocoa Beach for three nights in April, after the scrub of a launch date in March.

Safety and success are paramount to the launch of any rocket.

The first launch dates were from March 17 through 19.

As of March 16, NASA, Orbital ATK and United Launch Alliance (ULA) started targeting the launch of Orbital ATK's seventh commercial resupply services mission to the International Space Station to be at 9 p.m. EDT Friday, March 24.

An option existed, however, to move the launch earlier to March 23, if the Eastern Range became available.

The Orbital ATK CRS-7 Launch set for March 24 was delayed.

Plans to cover that previously slated launch were scrubbed by HardisonInk.com, because it did not happen.

A later notice from NASA showed April 18 as the new date.

The April 18 date seemed much more sure-fire. A room was booked for the nights of April 17, 18 and 19.

As anticipated by Hardison on this round, it was a perfect launch. The weather was excellent. Everything went smooth as silk.

As for sending the rocket and its cargo into space, all of the machinery and software passed all of the tests to go forward.

A United Launch Alliance facility is viewed from the causeway.

A United States Air Force facility is viewed from the causeway.

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DRESS CODE

Hardison made it to the NASA News Center Building in time to be among the few journalists allowed to view and film the launch from on top of the Vehicle Assembly Building.

The Vehicle (originally Vertical) Assembly Building, or VAB, at NASA's Kennedy

Space Center (KSC) is a building designed to assemble large space vehicles.

The building is at Launch Complex 39 at KSC on Merritt Island.

The VAB is the largest single-story building in the world in regard to cubic-feet of total space. It is 526 feet tall.

"When I heard the VAB was 500 feet tall," Hardison, a hobbyist drone pilot, said. "I thought that is as high as the FAA will allow me to fly my drone."

The drone could not be flown near NASA or any airport, though, due to FAA rules.

Unfortunately, although Hardison thought he was being smart by wearing stylish Air Force blue shorts and a white button-down shirt with the HardisonInk.com tag on it, he was advised -- literally at the last minute -- that shorts presented a safety issue.

"It all worked out," Hardison said, "I went on a bus to a restricted causeway viewing area. According to what I was told, sparks from welders and other safety hazards in the working area of the VAB cause shorts to be short of being enough coverage for safety. I guess that is how they became named shorts.

"Given that I return to cover another launch, though," he continued, "then I have been promised some level of more priority to be up on the VAB roof. I will take care and not short myself from that opportunity in the future. I'm thinking long black pants, a long-sleeve white shirt with a relatively thin black tie. I have seen the pictures of the NASA uniforms of the 1960s. And yes, Marion County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Robert Douglas, I will get a haircut."

About 30 to 50 "social media" representatives were in an area on the causeway near the spot reserved for more conventional journalists. This group was comprised of people who post on Facebook and similar outlets.

Traditional television networks and print media were present at various places.

"There are four places that other journalists told me about photographing the launch from," Hardison said. "There is the parking lot for the NASA News Center, on top of the CBS Building, the causeway and the VAB.

"From what I heard, the VAB is the best," Hardison said. "A very well-heeled photographer for a relatively strong space-oriented publication said he preferred the causeway that morning because shooting from the VAB would be aiming into the sun."

Hardison said that when the United States Air Force launches rockets, it lets some media representatives take shots from a causeway that is closer to the launch pad than the causeway where Hardison was stationed Tuesday.

"Another journalist from another outlet said there is a lot of wind on top of the VAB too," Hardison said. "As for me, I think it always works out for the best. I was safe from welder's sparks. I was farther away from the beating sun of that morning. I was not in with the big herd of journalists. And I was in very pleasant company on the bus, including our bus driver who was very thoughtful."

The NASA Office of Communications was very accommodating, Hardison added.

The representatives from Orbital ATK in the NASA News Center were extremely thoughtful too. This group provided members of the press with a beach bag, a stuffed swan toy, a mission adhesive sticker and a mission patch.

The stuffed swan was wearing a silver-colored removable cape that had an American flag on it.

The day before the launch and for about five hours after the launch, NASA, Orbital ATK and United Launch Alliance provided an extensive amount of resources to show the excellent progress in public-private partnerships to help commercial interests benefit

from the space program as this set of missions moves into the future.

Dolphin fins

Even members of the wildlife community in this reserve were cooperative on Tuesday.

"I watched a relatively healthy looking pod of dolphins frolicking in the Indian River Lagoon," Hardison said. "If I had been more attentive to them, I could have created video of at least two jumps where a dolphin completely left the water. Yes, I missed the dolphin launch video shots."

The visiting journalist said the sojourn to the east side of Florida was fun and educational.

Learn more about the Orbital ATK CRS-7 mission by going to the mission home page at **http://www.nasa.gov/orbitalatk**.