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NASA Challenges 350 Rocketeers Nationwide to Aim a Mile High

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. -- NASA has invited more than 350 student rocketeers from middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities -- 37 teams nationwide -- to take part in the 2009-2010 NASA Student Launch Projects. Their challenge is to build powerful rockets of their own design, complete with a working science payload, and launch

them to an altitude of 1 mile.

These annual rocketeering projects are the Student Launch Initiative for middle school and high school teams and the University Student Launch Initiative for colleges and universities. Both challenges are designed to inspire students to parlay their interests in science, technology, engineering and mathematics into rewarding careers in fields critical to NASA's mission of exploration and scientific discovery.

Beginning in the fall school term, each team will spend approximately eight months designing, building and field-testing their rocket. They address the same physics, propulsion and flight challenges faced by professional rocket engineers. The students also must challenge themselves as scientists, creating a unique, on-board science experiment that can survive the mile-high flight and yield test results after the vehicle parachutes back to Earth.

In addition, teams will create a project Web site, write multiple preliminary and post-launch reports, and develop educational engagement projects for schools and youth organizations in their communities. The goal is to inspire even younger generations of future explorers.

The Student Launch Projects will conclude April 15-18, 2010, when the teams gather at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala. Marshall manages the projects. NASA engineers will put the students' rockets through a professional design review similar to that undertaken for every NASA launch. The students then will embark on a two-day "launchfest" at Bragg Farms in Toney, Ala., where they are cheered on each year by hundreds of Marshall team members and North Alabama rocket enthusiasts.

"The participants in NASA's Student Launch Projects continue to demonstrate the sky is no limit for enterprising young minds committed to creativity, innovation and teamwork," said Tammy Rowan, manager of the Academic Affairs Office at Marshall, which organizes the event. "As a new rocket-building season gets under way and we head toward another exhilarating launch event next April, many of these industrious young people are headed toward rewarding careers in which they'll lead new journeys of exploration and discovery -- not just to Earth's lower troposphere, but to other worlds."

New Student Launch Initiative teams hail from middle schools and high schools in Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. Returning teams are from Illinois, North Carolina and Wisconsin. Middle school and high school teams taking part in the Student Launch Initiative are eligible to participate in the challenges up to two years. Each new team receives a \$3,700 grant and a travel stipend from NASA, and each returning team receives a \$2,450 grant.

New University Student Launch Initiative teams represent colleges and universities in Alabama, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina and Texas. Returning teams hail from Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota and Tennessee. College and university teams taking part in the University Student Launch Initiative seek funding from their state's Space Grant Consortium, and are not limited to two years of eligibility. The University Student Launch Initiative is a competitive event sponsored by ATK Space Systems of Magna, Utah, which contributes prizes, including a \$5,000 check for the first-place winner.

The Student Launch Projects are collaboratively sponsored by NASA's Exploration Systems Mission Directorate, Space Operations Mission Directorate and Education Flight Projects. NASA held the first student launch event in 2001. As its popularity grew, NASA created in 2006 the twin challenges of the Student Launch Initiative for middle schools and high schools and the University Student Launch Initiative for colleges and universities. Marshall issues a request for proposals each fall.

For more information about the Student Launch Projects and a list of participating schools, visit:

<http://education.msfc.nasa.gov/sli>

For more information about other NASA education initiatives, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov/education>

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