

FLORIDA TODAY

SERVING THE SPACE COAST

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Amanda Stratford, FLORIDA TODAY

Making a stand. Judie Targett, left, of Cocoa Beach, a space worker for 31 years, cheers with the multitude during the "Save Our Space Exploration" rally Saturday near Brevard Community College in Titusville. Organizers said about 1,500 people attended despite dreadful weather.

'Worth fighting for'

KSC workers, advocates refuse to take layoffs sitting down

BY PATRICK PETERSON
FLORIDA TODAY

TITUSVILLE — The coming collapse of the space industry has already cost restaurateur Laurilee Thompson one of her best waitresses.

At a jobs rally Saturday, Thompson, a co-owner of Dixie Crossroads in Titusville, joined politicians, teachers and union officials who decried the proposed 2011

NASA budget that would allow up to 9,000 jobs, many held by union workers, to evaporate from Kennedy Space Center when the shuttle stops flying after four more missions.

"She pulled her kids out of school in the middle of the year and moved to Pennsylvania, where her husband found a job after bailing from the space center," said Thompson, who fears a repeat of the economic devasta-

tion that followed the shutdown of the Apollo program in the mid-1970s.

"We don't have to sit back and let this happen to us again," Thompson said. "The Space Fairy is not going to come and save us. We've got to do it ourselves."

Waving placards that read "Jobs Now," about 1,500 people huddled against the cold in a park just north of Brevard Community College. **See FIGHTING, 11A**

WHAT THEY SAID. Community members, workers, beauty queen weigh in on past, present, future of space, 11A



Fighting words. "My family is worth fighting for. My community is worth fighting for. And these jobs are worth fighting for," District 1 Brevard County Commissioner Robin Fisher said.

FIGHTING, from 1A

College, where President Barack Obama campaigned in 2008. Some 2,000 to 4,000 people were expected, but the weather was blamed for keeping many away.

"My family is worth fighting for. My community is worth fighting for. And these jobs are worth fighting for," District 1 Brevard County Commissioner Robin Fisher said, echoing the rally's theme.

Pointing to the gymnasium where Obama appeared, Fisher said he wanted to "help remind the president what he said in that building, that he's going to help save jobs."

Fisher called on the workers to make their demands clear to Florida's lawmakers in Washington, D.C.

"We want you to extend the shuttle" should be the message, Fisher said. "We want you to hold up all votes on everything until Florida is taken care of. If that stops Washington, D.C., that's OK."

The end of the shuttle program could cause a total of 23,000 jobs to be lost in Brevard, already a county with a 12.1 percent unemployment rate. The economic blow will be felt deeply.

"Brevard schools are among the very best in the state as a direct result of the partnership with and the direct influence of the space program," said Janet Eastman, president of the Brevard Federation of Teachers.

Eastman warned that the loss of families from KSC will damage the quality of life countywide.

"The quality of public education will implode," Eastman said. "It won't be a gradual decline."

Many of the space workers have accepted that jobs will be lost at KSC. What they refuse to accept is the foundering U.S. space program, which will rely on commercial rockets for cargo and on the Russian space agency to ferry U.S. astronauts to the International Space Station, for which U.S. taxpayers have paid \$100 billion.

"I don't want to see our astronauts get suited up and get on Russian or Chinese spaceships," said John Kroening, 50, a nonunion production control worker with United Space Alliance. "We want to keep the space industry here. We've always been the leader."

The prospect of unemployment is secondary for Kroening.

"I could probably find another (job) in my field," he said. "It's the thing of losing manned spaceflight. It's too hard to stomach."

A political price could be paid for alienating these workers.

"We voted for the president, and this is what he's done to us, and we're pretty angry about it," machinist Tom Reid, 60, said. "I've never voted Republican, and I probably won't, but I won't vote Democrat either." ■

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'It's too hard

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to stomach'

"By taking away the space program, you're taking away their dreams."

Miss Florida 2009 Megan Clemente, an electrical engineering graduate of the University of Central Florida, who said a new generation of college graduates is disappointed that jobs in the space program are vanishing



Photos by Amanda Stratford, FLORIDA TODAY

The throng. Space workers cheer at the "Save our Space Exploration" rally near Brevard Community College in Titusville.

"If we all get together with demonstrations like this, I think we're going to catch some attention locally with the politicians, and maybe they'll reach out to Washington."

Jerry Heyman, president of the Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America Local No. 127

Husband, wife both looking for work

TITUSVILLE — Pat White lost her job at Kennedy Space Center in 1986 after the Challenger disaster, but it wasn't so bad for the then-new mother.



Pat White

White, now 57, was able to stay at home with her 1-month-old daughter, while her husband, Terry, continued working at KSC.

Now, with the shuttle program ending and no replacement program following it, White is applying for jobs for the first time in two decades.

"We need an income, or we need (health) insurance,"

she said.



Terry White

Relocating would be difficult because the couple would have to sell the seven acres they own on north Merritt Island. The good news is that they already have put their children through college.

"Everything we worked for, we'd lose," she said.

Terry White said it will be difficult for him to find a new job.

"No one wants to hire a 60-year-old rocket scientist," he said. ■

— Susanne Cervenka, FLORIDA TODAY

'Devastating' for everyone in county

TITUSVILLE — Salandra Benton doesn't work at Kennedy Space Center. Neither does anyone in her family.



Benton

But the 45-year-old Titusville woman said she will undoubtedly be affected by the job losses there.

"Churches, day cares. Every aspect of the community will be impacted by the decisions made by D.C.," she said.

Benton works for the

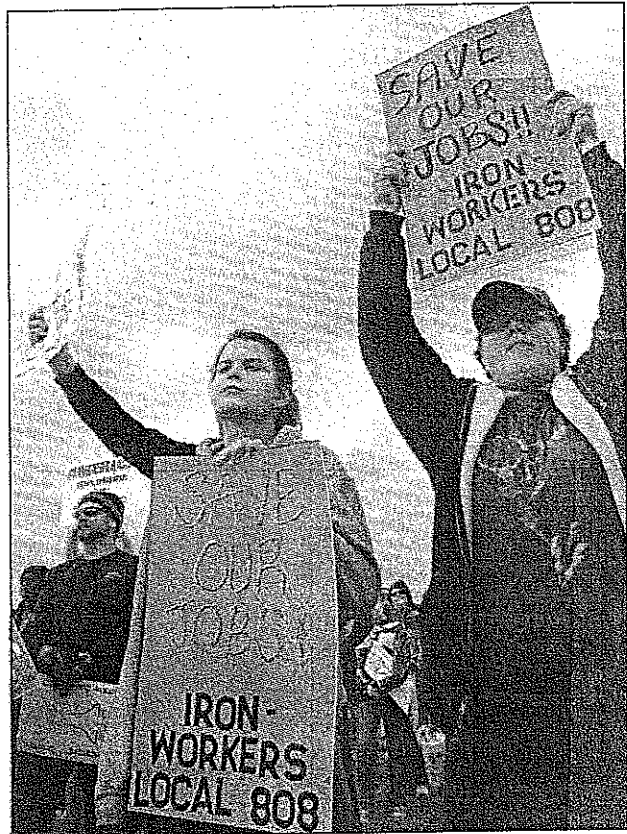
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers, a union that represents government employees.

She predicts that she'll see an even larger number of people seeking welfare benefits because of layoffs.

And she expects her property values to drop as her neighbors leave the community for jobs elsewhere.

"It's just going to be a human flight," she said. "It would just be devastating." ■

— Susanne Cervenka, FLORIDA TODAY



Family tradition. Ashley Russell, 21, left, and Kristine Koester, 21, of Orlando show their signs during the space rally Saturday. Koester is an ironworker apprentice at Kennedy Space Center, a member of the third generation from her family to work at KSC.

"We are here on this rainy, misty, cloudy day to remind our leaders in Congress that this community is worth fighting for and these jobs are worth holding on to."

Claudie Pouncey, president of Space Coast AFL-CIO

A life, livelihood based on shuttle

TITUSVILLE — Wayne Saturday's entire career is linked to the shuttle program. He doesn't want to leave the Space Coast if he doesn't have to.



Saturday

"We all need to keep work in this area," said Saturday, a member of International Machinists and Aerospace Workers. "This is where we want to raise our families."

The 53-year-old from Oak Hill has been working at Kennedy Space Center for the past 21 years in the heavy equipment division. Before that, he worked with Florida East Coast Railway rebuilding the tracks to bring shuttle components to KSC.

"There's not many places we have to utilize those skills," he said. ■

— Susanne Cervenka,
FLORIDA TODAY

Quality engineer tries to 'hang on'

TITUSVILLE — Tony Singleton remembers the Apollo program coming to an end and the layoffs that came after the Challenger disaster.



Singleton

"The community was absolutely devastated," said the 62-year-old Canaveral Groves man who has worked in the space industry for more than 30 years.

He's in the middle of switching jobs at Kennedy Space Center. He left a job as an instructor at Yang Enterprises and is starting as a quality engineer at Lockheed Martin.

But he still worries. And retirement, he said, is not an option. "I hope I can hang on," he said. ■

— Susanne Cervenka,
FLORIDA TODAY

Shuttle job was a 5th-grade dream

TITUSVILLE — Leah Struchen wanted to work in the space program since fifth grade, when she gave a report on the shuttle.



Struchen

The 24-year-old reached her dream last year when United Space Alliance hired her as an engineering analyst.

Struchen, of Titusville, said she had a "great year" and that the shuttle's end is upsetting. But for President Barack Obama to cancel Constellation is even worse.

"For them to get rid of that replacement is hard to swallow and the wrong way to go," she said. "What are the fifth-graders now going dream about?" ■

— Susanne Cervenka,
FLORIDA TODAY