

# Thousands raise voices to Obama: 'Save space'



Photos by Craig Rubadoux, FLORIDA TODAY

**Singing along.** Space supporters, including Curtis Goode of Titusville and Joann Moore of Mims, sing "I Believe I Can Fly" during Sunday afternoon's Community Space Rally at the Cocoa Expo. Find more photos from the rally online at [www.floridatoday.com](http://www.floridatoday.com)

# Community rallies together, plans a message for president

BY JIM WAYMER  
FLORIDA TODAY

COCOA — Thousands packed Cocoa Expo on Sunday in a unified plea to President Barack Obama to extend the shuttle program, send astronauts to the moon and Mars, and maintain America's lead in space and the inspiration the program inspires.

They waved signs that read, "Save Space." They warned of the national security implications of ceding dominance in space to Russia and China. And they worried about the estimated 8,000 Kennedy Space Center jobs that will go away when the shuttle lands for the last time.

"I'm going to have to look for another job," said Sylvester Houston of Titusville, who works in test operations for United Space Alliance and has been involved with the

shuttle program since 1981.

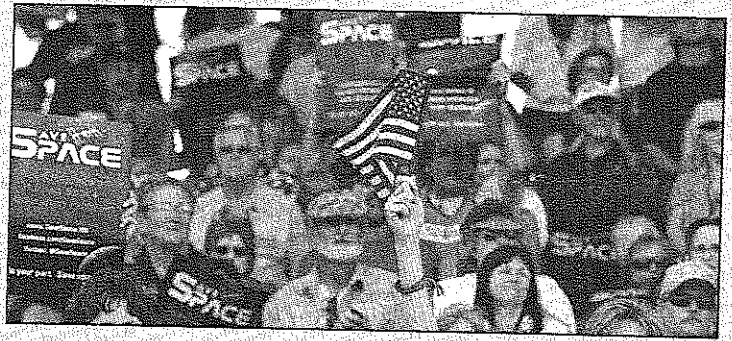
Estimates of attendance ranged as high as more than 4,000 for Sunday's "Save Space" community rally, which lasted about two hours. It included music, prayers and short speeches from politicians and retired astronauts.

"We've got something worth fighting for, don't we?" said Brevard County Commissioner Robin Fisher to cheers from the crowd, as he led off the political speakers. "We've got to be first. Russia's got to play second."

Fisher said he planned to hand Obama, expected on the Space Coast Thursday, a banner signed by many who attended Sunday's event. "Save Space. Save America's Human Space Exploration Program," it reads.

See VOICE, 7A

## What's inside



### Attendees sign banner for Obama

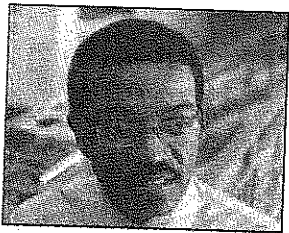
Titusville resident Judy Hencin had people sign a banner they plan to give to President Obama on Thursday. The banner says: Save Space. Save America's Human Space Exploration Program, 7A

### 'We can't afford not to be in space'

Earline Smiley helped hand out placards people waved during the space rally, 7A

### What about the museum?

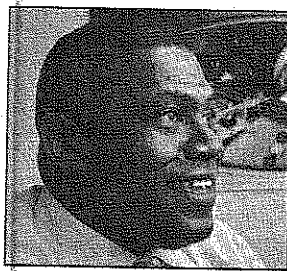
Lee Starrick is worried after the shuttle stops flying, the Space Walk of Fame Museum will be done as well, 7A



"Mr. President, fly the shuttle until we have a viable alternative. Keep us flying."

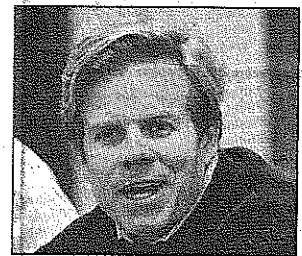
— Robert Jordan,  
Brevard County  
School Board  
member.

## They said it



"We need human spaceflight. We've got to be first. Russia's got to play second."

— Robin Fisher,  
Brevard County  
commissioner.



"We are showing the world that space is our future. We are the Space Coast and it's not in name only."

— Mike Haridopolos,  
State senator.



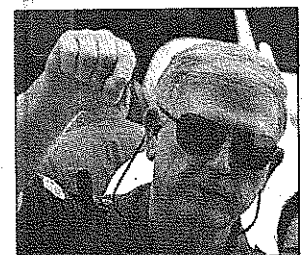
"For 50 years, we have led the world and inspired dreams. We cannot let this end."

— George LeMieux,  
U.S. Senator.



"We cannot allow the Chinese or the Russians or anyone else to seize superiority in space away from us."

— Jeff Kottkamp,  
Florida Lt.  
Governor.



"We've been told by our leaders that we can't have it all. And I say, why not?"

— Jon McBride,  
Retired shuttle  
astronaut.

## SAVE SPACE COMMUNITY RALLY



Tim Shortt, FLORIDA TODAY

**Crowd favorite.** At right, Astronaut Winston Scott addresses a cheering crowd. In the background, left to right: Astronaut Jon McBride, County Commissioner Robin Fisher and Brevard County School board member Robert Jordan.

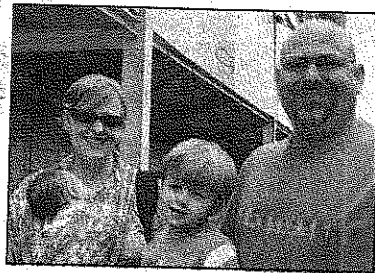
## Decision more than just jobs

Chris Robbins, a 38-year-old calibration technician with space industry contractor Bionetics Corp., and his wife, Misty, 33, attended Sunday's rally with other family. Like many, jobs were on their mind.

"If they don't have a space program, he doesn't have a job," Misty Robbins said.

Chris Robbins works on projects tied to both NASA launches and unmanned rocket launches from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station.

In addition to the loss of jobs, he



said he was concerned about the end of the shuttle program meaning the United States "would have to rely on Russian assistance" to transport astronauts to the International Space Station.

"We all know how that goes," Chris Robbins said. ■

— Dave Berman, FLORIDA TODAY

— Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY

### President's visit

President Barack Obama is scheduled to arrive at Kennedy Space Center at 1:45 p.m. Thursday, the White House said.

He'll make a "major space policy" speech at 3 p.m. and depart at 3:45 p.m.



Tim Shortt, FLORIDA TODAY

**Plenty of backing.** Volunteers Debra King, left, and her mother, Judy Hencin, pick up a banner signed by thousands.

## Banner signed, ready to deliver

Titusville resident Judy Hencin is a 24-year veteran with United Space Alliance, where she works in ground project management.

Before the rally, she helped attendees use black Sharpie markers to sign a long white banner that stretched across four folding tables.

The banner read, "Save Space: Save America's Human Space Exploration Program."

"This is the banner we're going to give to the president," Hencin said of President Barack Obama's

Thursday visit to Kennedy Space Center.

Fearing the worst, Hencin is preparing to find work elsewhere. This summer, she hopes to study graphics technology at Brevard Community College.

If Hencin had the opportunity to personally speak to Obama, she said she would deliver a brief message: "Keep America No. 1 in space." ■

— Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY

## If shuttle goes, museum next?

Lee Starrick was hired in 1968 by the Kennedy Space Center Fire Department. In 1976, his employment ended.

"I worked at KSC when Apollo shut down, and I was one of the ones who got laid off," the Titusville resident said. "I know what it's going to be like this time around — it's going to be worse."

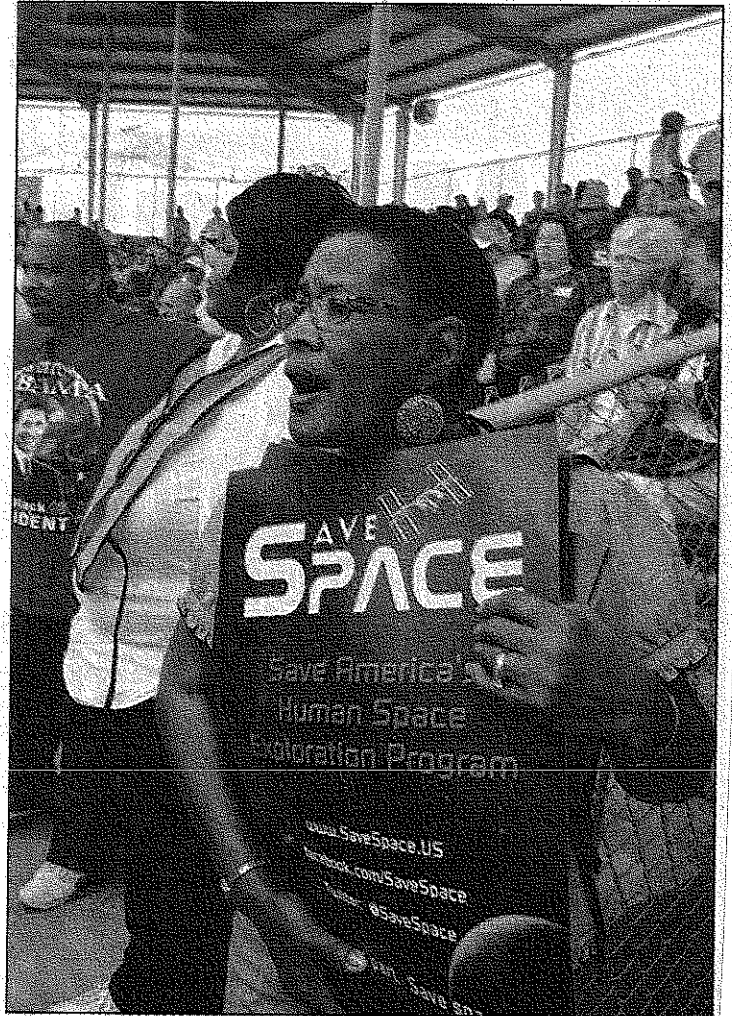
Starrick was rehired in 1978 when the shuttle program kicked off, and he retired as a fire lieutenant

in 2003. Today, he works as curator of the Space Walk of Fame Museum.

The museum earns "a good chunk" of its operating revenues by selling souvenirs during shuttle launches at Space View Park in Titusville, he said.

After the shuttle stops flying? "We'll probably be done," Starrick said of the museum. ■

— Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY



Tim Shortt, FLORIDA TODAY

**Helping out.** Earline Smiley of Port St. John works at KSC. She helped hand out the placards she is holding.

## 'Can't afford not to be in space'

Inside the Stadium, Earline Smiley handed out an armful of black "Save Space" placards for attendees to wave during the rally.

Smiley celebrated her 40th anniversary last month with EG&G Technical Services. She works as a product inspector for the space contractor.

"We can't afford not to be in space. This is the United States of America," Smiley said, standing in the stadium behind home plate.

"Right now, we're No. 1. We can't afford to sit in the back seat."

Smiley wore an orange reflective vest as a rally volunteer. She got involved via her church, New Life Christian Fellowship in Titusville.

"It's for Brevard County and Houston, Texas, and the people out in New Orleans. It's not just Brevard County," she said. "It's a lot of other areas that will be devastated by reductions in workforce." ■

# Community 'ready for a fight'

## VOICE, from 1A

Republicans and Democrats alike pledged to fight for more space funding.

"For 50 years, we have led the world and inspired dreams. We cannot let this end," said U.S. Sen. George LeMieux, a Republican.

U.S. Rep. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge, also promised to keep fighting to keep Americans first in space.

"Space is our military high ground, and we cannot cede it," he said.

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Kosmas, D-New Smyrna Beach, said the president needs to identify a space destination, a vehicle and a timeline. Her district includes KSC.

"We need a plan that inspires future generations, not moving the chairs around on the deck of the Titanic," she said.

Of Obama's visit to KSC on Thursday, Kosmas said: "I'm cautiously optimistic that he will have some good news for us."

Last week, NASA announced plans to open an office at KSC to oversee the development of commercial space taxis to and from the International Space Station at a

cost of \$5.8 billion over the next five years. The space agency also would spend \$1.9 billion through 2015 to transform KSC into a "21st Century Launch Complex."

In all, Obama's proposed budget for 2011 would bring an extra \$4 billion to the Kennedy Space Center through 2015.

But to retired shuttle astronaut Jon McBride, a speaker at the event, that's not enough. In his speech to the crowd, he said NASA's budget has been reduced from between 3 percent and 4 percent of the federal budget during the Apollo days to less than 1 percent now.

"We've been told by our leaders that we can't have it all. And I say, 'Why not?'"

"It's an excellent return on your investment," he said.

## Keep dream alive

In his turn at the microphone, Florida Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp called putting a man on the moon the single greatest achievement of mankind.

"We cannot allow the Chinese or the Russians or anyone else to seize superiority in space away from us," he said.

And state Sen. Mike Haridopolos echoed the sentiment: "Do you want to rely on the Russians to go into space?"

"No!" the crowd shouted back.

While the cost of the space program may seem enormous, it is a small price to pay to inspire students in math, science and engineering, said Brevard County School Board member Robert Jordan.

Enterprise Elementary School students read letters they wrote to the president, urging him to save the space program.

"Please keep mine and many others' dreams alive," said student Kevin Noland.

## Everyone's affected

John Coverdale, a 21-year-old University of Central Florida student from Titusville, said he came to the rally to hear what the speakers had to say about their plan to keep space jobs in the area. Both his brother and uncle have jobs tied to the space program.

Noting that Titusville already has economic difficulties, Coverdale said, if there is a large gap in manned spaceflights from KSC, "we'll be like a ghost town."

Port St. John resident April Smith, 36, a former employee of the KSC Visitor Complex, said it's not just about the jobs that may be lost with the end of the shuttle program.

"It's about the community as a whole," she said. "It's vital that we keep space in America and in the community."

Brian Hendrix, 61, of Merritt Island said he also worries about more than the workers. He is retired from managing a medical practice.

"Everybody around here is going to be affected, one way or the other," Hendrix said.

Before the rally began, Titusville resident Charles Bragg prompted cheers from the crowd by walking through the stadium wearing a white astronaut costume, complete with decorative patches and a black plastic visor.

Bragg, a mechanic at Kelly Ford, said attendees were in good spirits.

"Extremely optimistic. It looks like no one here's down-in-the-dumps and giving up," he said. "It looks like everyone's ready to fight." ■

Staff writers Dave Berman and Rick Neale contributed to this report.