

For Immediate Release

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McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center Celebrates National Day In Saudi Arabia

CONCORD, NH – The American Embassy National Day Celebration in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24, 2010, featured the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center of Concord, New Hampshire, USA. The Discovery Center designed the Embassy's National Day exhibition on space exploration. Discovery Center Commissioner Erle B. Pierce participated in the celebration as a guest of Ambassador James Smith and his wife, Dr. Janet Breslin-Smith.

National Day celebrations are held each year in U.S. Embassies worldwide. For the celebration in Saudi Arabia, Ambassador Smith chose science and technology as the 2010 National Day theme. Honored guests at the celebration included veteran NASA Astronauts Rusty Schweickart and Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud. While in Riyadh, Pierce and Schweickart met with students at the American International School and shared the importance of science and math studies as keys to exciting careers. Pierce noted, "Rusty Schweickart talked to the students about being an astronaut, which was very exciting for them. My job was to help the students see that there are many different types of opportunities that will contribute to future technologies and exploration."

Pierce also spent time with Dr. Khalid Taher, Executive Director of the Prince Salman Science Oasis, a large science center currently under construction in Riyadh. "The Science Oasis and the Discovery Center have many common interests," Pierce stated. "We will work collaboratively to promote educational opportunities for young people in both countries in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)."

The Discovery Center's National Day exhibition focused on space exploration, from the contributions of early Arabic astronomers and mathematicians that laid the groundwork for today's efforts in space, to the heady days of competition between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. during the Space Race, to today's international cooperative efforts. The exhibition featured space pioneers Alan Shepard, Christa McAuliffe, Rusty Schweickart, and Prince Sultan. An experienced jet pilot, secretary general of his nation's tourism commission, and nephew of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Prince Sultan flew aboard NASA's STS-51G Discovery mission in June 1985 as payload specialist on the seven-member international crew. The exhibition highlighted the critical role science centers around the world play in capturing young people's imaginations and creating the next generation of scientists, technicians, engineers, and mathematicians who will further the exploration of our universe – a role clearly recognized by Commissioner Pierce.

"To me, this trip provided a perspective on the importance of places like the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center," said Pierce. "The Discovery Center is doing important work, not only for the people of New England, but for our country and the world."

The McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center features 21st century interactive exhibits on Earth and space sciences, astronomy, and aviation, a state-of-the-art planetarium and a variety of science, technology, engineering and math programs geared towards families, teens, seniors, students, community groups, and lifelong learners. For more information, visit www.starhop.com.



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