



LOGAN HOMESHOW

Admission & Parking

PRESENTING SPONSOR:



MEDIA SPONSOR:



FRIDAY JAN 25 10AM - 8PM & SATURDAY JAN 26 10AM - 6PM • CACHE COUNTY EVENT CENTER • LOGANHOMESHOW.COM

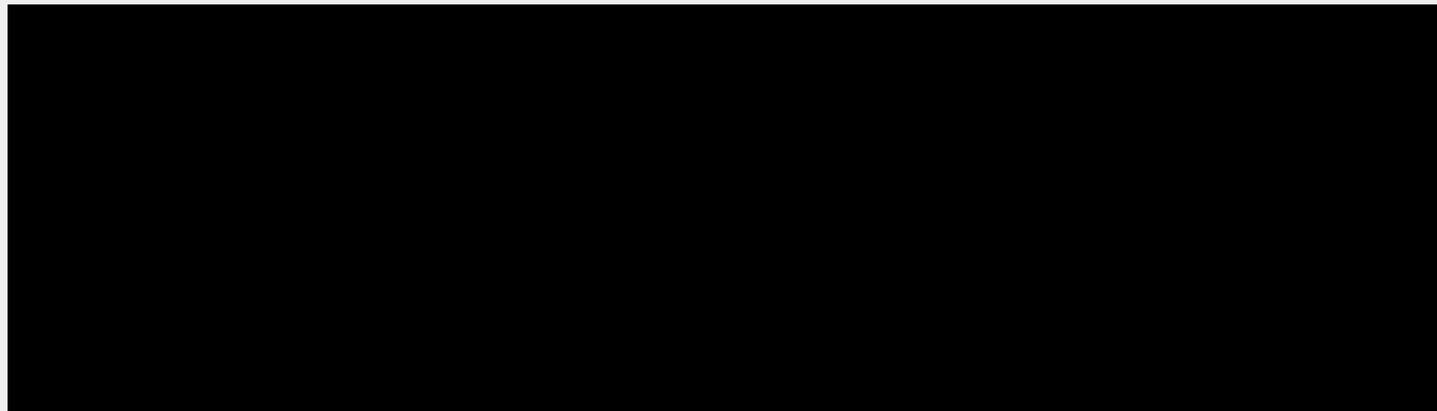
NEXT UP

Indians fare well at district meet

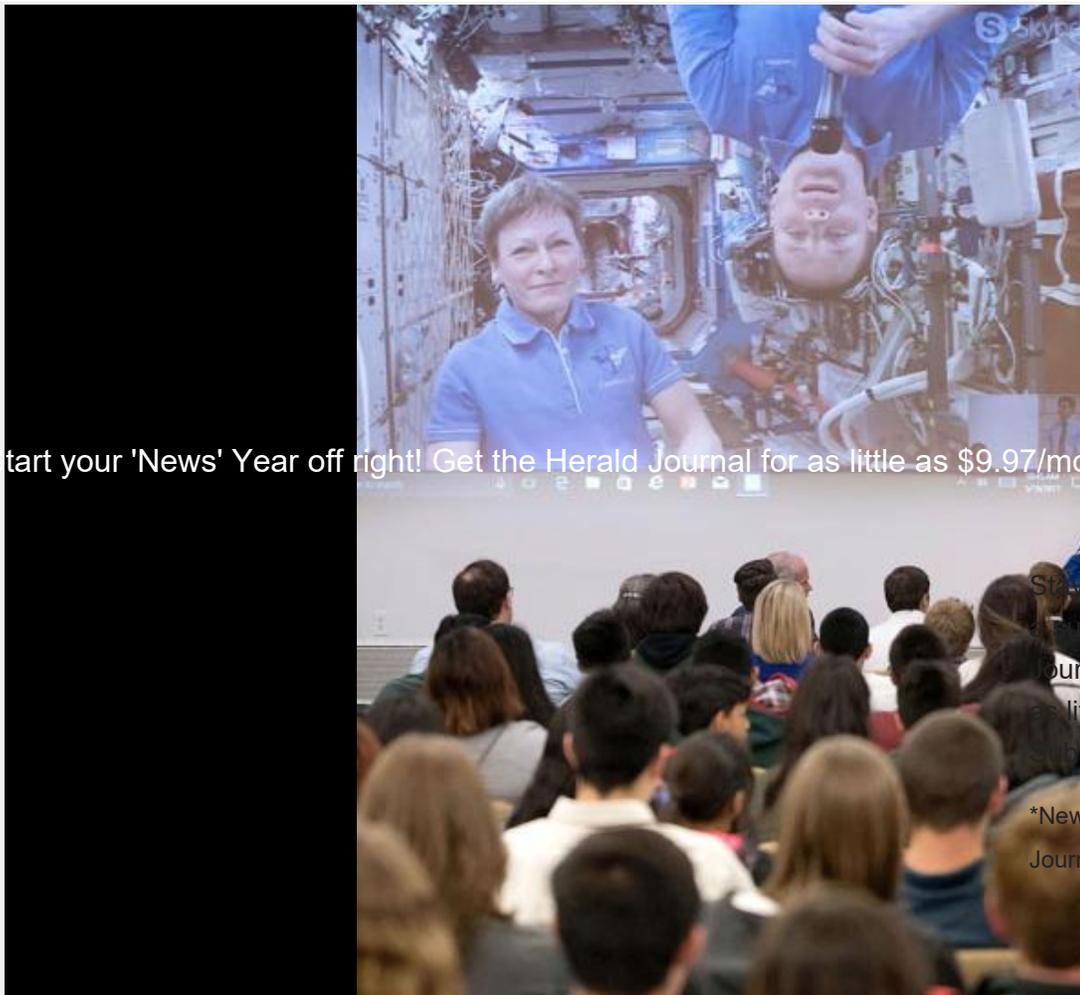
Event titles were extremely hard to come by for Preston's track & field team...

Students talk to space explorers in NASA downlink

By Sean Dolan staff writer May 19, 2017



Start your 'News' Year off right! Get the Herald Journal for as little as \$9.97/month



Start your 'News' Year off right! Get the Herald Journal for as little as \$9.97/month

Stay on top of all things local with a subscription to the Herald Journal! Order home delivery for as little as \$9.97 a month! Subscribe today!

*New subscribers only within the Herald Journal's normal delivery area.

[Subscribe Today!](#)

Astronauts Peggy Whitson and Jack Fischer, who are on the International Space Station, speak with students assembled at the Space Dynamics Laboratory in North Logan on Friday.

[Buy Now](#)

Eli Lucero/Herald Journal

In a once-in-a-generation opportunity, students from Northern Utah used a video call to the International Space Station to ask questions to two astronauts orbiting Earth on Friday morning.

ISS Commander Peggy Whitson and NASA Astronaut Jack Fischer appeared in a live video downlink in front of 200 students at the Space Dynamics Laboratory in North Logan. In typical astronaut fashion, Fischer appeared upside down on the call, and both astronauts sported huge grins as they welcomed the students.

After the Johnson Space Center in Houston connected the ISS to the auditorium in North Logan, retired NASA Astronaut Charlie Precourt greeted his friends, making it clear that he prefers being on the extraterrestrial side of NASA downlinks.

“This is Charlie Precourt. Are you hearing me OK?” he said.

“We’re hearing you great, Charlie. It’s great to hear your voice,” Whitson said.

“I am really jealous not to be on that side of the phone call,” Precourt said.

Students from InTech Collegiate High School, Logan High, Dual Immersion Academy in Salt Lake, Uintah High in Vernal, North Sanpete Middle in Moroni and others attended the presentation while other schools around the state watched live on NASA TV.

NASA generally conducts three such downlinks a year for school children, so this was a rare opportunity for Utahns. Brooke McKenna, education and outreach administrator for Space Dynamics Laboratory, said NASA selected Northern Utah because schools guaranteed they would have a lot of students attend and they would hold pre-events to generate excitement. Sen. Orrin Hatch also played a heavy role in influencing NASA.

Hatch had planned to attend the downlink, but in a pre-recorded video he expressed regret that his legislative responsibilities kept him in Washington. He said he hopes the interaction with the two astronauts inspires a greater appreciation for the space program and encourages young people to get involved in STEM courses and careers.

“I encourage all of you to use this event today to learn and grow and develop greater curiosity in your studies,” Hatch said.

In addition to the help of Sen. Hatch and the Space Dynamics Laboratory, InTech Collegiate High, Cache Makers and the USU GEAR UP program served as strategic partners for the downlink.

Jim Dorward, GEAR UP project director, said events like this encourage students to go to college and explore STEM careers.

“When you talk to them they start saying, ‘I want to be an electrical engineer; I want to be a mechanical engineer; I want to be an astronaut.’ And they start thinking about, ‘Well, OK, how do you get there?’” Dorward said. “That’s what we try to do, is help them get there.”

Just before the Q&A began, Jed Hancock, civil space division director at Space Dynamics Lab, gave the students a sense of the scale of the International Space Station. The ISS is like a six-bedroom house flying at 17,500 miles per hour.

“Just in the time frame of this phone call, in the 20 minutes we talk, they will travel about 6,000 miles,” Hancock said. “They will go all the way across the distance of the United States.”

Students expecting a boring Q&A were in for a surprise.

In response to a question about his favorite space food, Fischer said his answer is “everything, because it floats.” He grabbed a pouch of tropical punch and squeezed out a ball

of liquid while explaining that surface tension keeps it all intact. Then he sucked it up, leaving a few red drops on his lips as students laughed.

“Tricks by Jack,” he said.

Another student asked what the astronauts like to do in their free time.

“Looking out the window never gets boring because we get to see the Earth,” Whitson said.

The commander said the ISS orbits Earth 16 times a day, and they can see the sunrise and sunset every 45 minutes. The astronauts also have time to talk to friends and family when the right satellite capabilities are available. She said they also find ways to have fun floating through the space station and playing around in zero gravity.

In response to a question about how the astronauts have adjusted to space, Whitson said it can be tough working on experiments or repairs while all of their tools float away. She learned to secure tools with Velcro or bags. Physiologically, she said astronauts can experience fluid shifts, changes to their eyes and — if they don’t get enough exercise — muscle and bone loss.

A few of the questions had staged, humorous answers. One student asked if any of the astronauts play musical instruments.

“Why, that is a fantastic question,” Fischer said. “I don’t, but we just so happen to have someone who does.”

From off screen, French astronaut Thomas Pesquet came floating past the two Americans, playing his saxophone.

Fischer was also inspiring. A student asked what it feels like to be a member of the small group of people who have been in space.

He said it’s humbling and inspiring because he wants to make that list a lot bigger. He told the students that if they are engaging in STEM courses, they will be the “fuel for our engine that takes us into the next generation.” He said he feels space exploration is about to really take off.

“You are the generation that is going to take us into the heavens for good, and I’m really excited for that list to get huge really soon,” Fischer said. “And hopefully, your names will be on it.”

As the 20-minute call came to an end, Whitson curled up into a ball as Fischer spun her in circles as he waves goodbye.

Owyn Zelenik, a seventh-grade student at Mount Logan Middle School, said he felt inspired to be an astronaut, and he definitely wants to pursue a STEM career.

Zayhetezi Nunez, an InTech Senior, was one of the lucky students who asked a question. She has had plans to be a lawyer, but the event might make her reconsider a STEM career.

“It made me realize that anybody can go up there,” Nunez said.

sdolan@hjnews.com Twitter: @RealSeanDolan

Tags

North Logan Utah Space Dynamics Laboratory Nasa Downlink Orrin Hatch Peggy Whitson Charlie Precourt
Jack Fischer Astronauts Astronaut Aerospace Engineering Student

News Trending Today

- 1 Jury finds Torrey Green guilty of 5 counts of rape
- 2 Logan man suspected of sexually assaulting a child 'hundreds of times'
- 3 Maternity suites at Logan Regional provide mothers more birthing options
- 4 Logan Marathon to succeed Top of Utah Marathon
- 5 Criminal proceedings for funeral director to take place in Salt Lake City