

Bernath brings travelling space show to York

Aerospace artifacts entice astronomer

Amateur astronomer and space buff Jim Bernath, whose interest in space flight soared after reading Buck Rogers (science) comic books over 50 years ago, is displaying his travelling aerospace exhibit at York until Friday. A Vancouverite born in Windsor, he graduated from Western University in Arts and later attended Osgoode Hall Law School for a year.

Bernath has been touring Canada with this exhibit since the first shuttle flight in 1981. Excalibur's **ZENA H. McBRIDE** spoke with Bernath in a crowded Central Square bearpit filled with his aerospace memorabilia.

EXCAL: How did you become involved in this?

BERNATH: Well, I took some pictures of the first shuttle takeoff and the pictures turned out. I was not expecting to be doing this, but my friends said, "Oh, wow, terrific picture of the shuttle, can I buy one?" and I said, "Sure," and here I am, and you can still buy one.

EXCAL: Is that what prompted you to start touring?

BERNATH: Well, there's a tremendous investment in the photos—there's \$20- to \$30-thousand worth of pictures ultimately, and so, having put together a display of photos, the next thing that comes up is how do we make these photos pay for themselves now that we've got them up? They're rented to shopping centres but the pictures by themselves don't mean so much. If I am there, too, then it's a different kettle of fish.

So it just grew from having my own photos and posters and NASA photos and posters, to other peoples' posters and a whole lot of artifacts and space-related things. Because of what I am doing, travelling coast-to-coast, I run into the damnest people who have got the most amazing knowledge or experience or artifacts.

EXCAL: Did you ever dream of becoming an astronaut?

BERNATH: No, I've not dreamed of becoming an astronaut, nor really wanted to be an astronaut. I've always been fascinated by space travel. But I would never have thought that I would be standing around people who came back from the moon.

EXCAL: How do you obtain the artifacts?

BERNATH: Well, basically from people who work and have worked with the space program in one way or another, all the way from the Kennedy Space Centre to the North-West Territories, and everything in between. You know when I'm here for a week, there must be thousands upon thousands of people who stop. If Marc Garneau comes to a campus to give a talk, that's a very singular event, but how many people are there? 300? 600?

These artifacts have been seen now by about one and a half million Canadians who have actually stopped. That Russian fuel tank (for instance): there isn't another item in

this country that's been touched by as many Canadian hands as that has, from coast to coast.

EXCAL: Where do you travel most—to towns, or universities?

BERNATH: Well, I go to all, from the big cities to the small cities and everything in between. It's a 'happence' thing, and some of it reflects loyalty to where I've been before. I'll go to a small place that I do know in preference to a big place that I don't know. This is not a money-making machine.

EXCAL: So it is not a financially profitable business, then?

BERNATH: Well, I want it to be, but I can't go on putting money into it, and it's very expensive, putting this on the road and keeping it on the road. This must be at least 40 percent different from what it was when I was here last year, and there isn't the money to maintain that change and turnover without a lot of hard work.

EXCAL: At what places do you get the most reception?

BERNATH: Universities are excellent. The feedback is excellent, the level of knowledge that greets it is excellent. Although, again, that varies.

I can go to some campus where they think the shuttle is a war machine and all of space is a war game, and there's a vocal element that will be rather negative about the whole thing. That's fine; they can believe what they want to believe. I don't have an axe to grind.

If NASA crashes, I have photos of it up, whereas if you go to the Smithsonian (Institute) or something, they will have muted some of these pictures down some. (Yet) I have to be nice so I'll have support for the materials, photos and knowledge I am forever tapping them for.

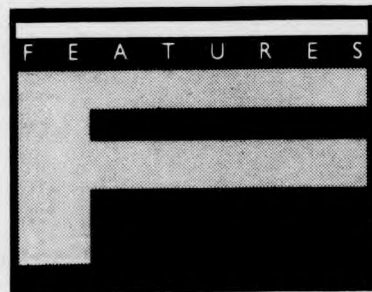
I spent one hour on the phone long distance to the Kennedy Space Centre just four to five days ago to learn what's new and what's happening with the booster repair and reconstruction. I don't want to abuse this kind of contact. On the other hand, I'm independent, and I tell it like I hear it, not like they want it to be heard.

EXCAL: What are some of the more interesting experiences you've had, and the people you've met?

BERNATH: Well, I can just give you some cute ones. This fellow came up



Jim Bernath proudly displays his "most treasured" space memorabilia. His exhibit includes posters, photographs, badges, ship parts, and other paraphernalia. Bernath even wears some of his wares.



to my table one day and said, "Oh, I see you've got a picture of Sam the monkey there. I'm the doctor that looked after him." I said, "Well, tell me all about it." And he said that Sam flew successfully, and he lived for about 10 years in the San Antonio Zoo happily afterwards. Then he died from old age. The doctor said, "I did the autopsy on him and he had tuberculosis. So for all of our medical expertise and knowledge, we've put a tubercular monkey into space."

NASA prides itself on doing things correctly and properly, and so they look after their animals; they train them to the nth degree, but they're cared for properly and they're not abused. Yet I understand that at one point, the monkeys got out of their cages, in a million dollar lab, and they just trashed the lab. Very specifically, they would poo all over these dials and buttons, and smear their excrement all over; they were really giving a message that they didn't like this kind of thing. That was apparently a sort of landmark.

EXCAL: What are some of the advances that you foresee in space travel in the future? Do you see another space shuttle going up very soon?

BERNATH: Well, they're building another shuttle. I'm very surprised that they're not building two other shuttles while they're at it. I think the shuttle is going to be the work-horse for the US, and I don't see anything that is going to eclipse it in the next 10 or 20 years. They have other space vehicles and the Europeans are building one, and the Russians have one, but they're not going to measure up to the shuttle and the shuttle's capabilities.

EXCAL: How do you feel about the commercial space tours being planned?

BERNATH: Well, I'm not too sure how solid those plans are. But apparently they are real plans and I wouldn't be at all surprised in my lifetime to see that people are going up as tourists. They're going to pay a lot of money, but they're going to go.

EXCAL: Do you have any other comments that you'd like to add?

BERNATH: It used to be that I thought the only people who were really angry at bureaucracies are the people who wanted to somehow cut corners, and they didn't want to be brought up short by some bureaucrat somewhere. But no. The deadening hand of bureaucracies is just awful, and I hate it. So that has been the lesson to me in what I'm doing.

If you were going to have some government department run my show, you have no idea how much money it would cost. I set all of this stuff up myself and I take it around myself.

EXCAL: So it's more profitable to do it on your own then?

BERNATH: As far as society is concerned, the more encouragement there can be for this way of doing it, the more you're going to get for the least money put out. You get a lot out of me without it costing you very much.

EXCAL: How long do you foresee doing this?

BERNATH: This'll be my career for the rest of my life, I expect, in one form or another. When I'm not able to travel so much, then I'll circle the wagons, travel less, and do things by mail. I hope to get to all the countries that have been in space—China, Russia, India, Japan, France—and come back with my version of what they are doing. I think that Canadians as well as those who are from these countries are very interested and would be interested in what is going on over there.

EXCAL: How many places do you travel on average in a year?

BERNATH: I'm in a different place every week. But I can't keep that up for 52 weeks in a year. So I have breaks in between where I repair and re-nourish my artifacts, and my display, or I go and see some events.

EXCAL: Do you do this all by yourself or does someone help you?

BERNATH: No, I work on my own. But it's very exciting. I like travelling, I love driving, I love the country. I've seen Canada from coast to coast with this. I've seen interesting places in the US; I've seen the shuttle under construction; I've seen the research facilities where they test the new vehicles. This has been tremendously interesting and exciting for me. I love the people, and love the country.

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