

Future astronauts? Teens 'experience' flight at camp

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A pair of suburban teens watched the launch of the space shuttle Discovery last month with renewed interest.

Brad Johnson, 13, of Arlington Heights and Scott Gallo, 13, of Barrington had just returned from attending Level I of the Future Astronaut Training Program at the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center in Hutchinson, Kan.

"There was so much more that I understood," said Johnson, an eighth-grader at London Middle School in Wheeling.

The two first cousins were among 40 youngsters who attended the entry-level space camp that features a week of hands-on, high-flying adventures. During the intense week, they experienced actual astronaut training and

School's out

What students are doing this summer

worked on simulators related to both manned and unmanned space flight.

"That's what I loved the most, using all the different simulators," Johnson said. "I felt as though I was really flying in space."

In the advanced flight simulator, they learned to pilot an F-101 and F-16 aircraft, and even experienced walking on the moon, using the simulator. They also learned how to control their body movements on a multi-axis trainer, and felt the sensation of liftoff in the Centrifuge, a g-force trainer.

During a Lunar rover mission, much like the Mars Sojourner, they guided a

computer-controlled rover around rocks and craters while picking up samples to return to "Earth."

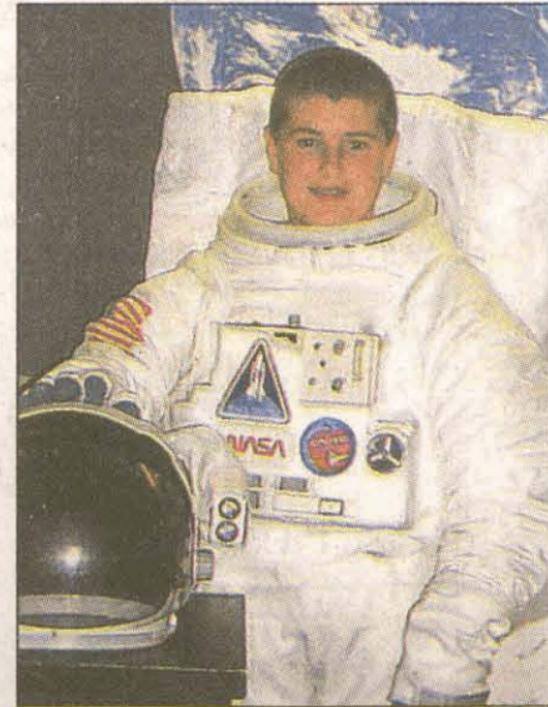
The week culminated with campers flying their own space shuttle mission aboard the Cosmosphere's state-of-the-art space shuttle simulator, the Falcon III.

"That was my favorite," said Scott Gallo, an eighth-grader at Barrington Middle School, Prairie Campus. "You had to flip switches and push buttons. It felt like the real thing with a lot of hydraulics."

Brad Johnson said he was drawn to the camp because of his lifelong interest in the solar system and outer space, while Scott followed the lead set by his older brother, who has attended all three levels of astronaut training and this summer attended camp at the U.S.



Brad Johnson



Scott Gallo

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Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala. "I just want to learn everything there is to know about space," Scott said.

The Kansas Cosmosphere features a Hall of Space Museum with one of the largest space collections in the world. In it campers see the actual Apollo 13 command module, Odyssey, and the largest collection of Russian space artifacts outside Moscow.

More than 8,500 campers have attended levels of astronaut training at the Cosmosphere over the last 20 years, and many have gone on to pursue careers in engineering, the Air Force and with NASA.

"The camp offers a rich experience in science and math," said Jessica Lucas Miller, marketing coordinator, "but it's as much about team building and leadership training as it is about furthering a career in the space industry."