

SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO & FLORIDA'S SPACE COAST: TWO COMMUNITIES WITH A SHARED HISTORY

The Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine has established a regional clerkship hub in affiliation with Steward Health Care and Florida Institute of Technology in the Florida communities of Melbourne, Rockledge and Sebastian, a region collectively known as the Space Coast.

The relationship established between these leading institutions is further strengthened by their unique and shared roles in the establishment and success of U.S. space exploration. Here is a brief history of the historical connections between Southern New Mexico and the Space Coast, two areas that were—and continue to be—instrumental in the space program.

Robert Goddard, one of the founding fathers of modern rocketry, relocated to Roswell, New Mexico, in the summer of 1930 to begin what would become a decade of liquid-fueled rocket tests. At the end of World War II, Wernher von Braun, who was inspired by and credited the work of Goddard, initiated advanced tests of his liquid-fueled rocket, the V-2, at White Sands Proving Grounds adjacent to Las Cruces, New Mexico (known today as Whites Sands Missile Range). New Mexico and Florida were linked by their space heritage for the first time in 1950, when, after six previous launches at White Sands, two rockets based on the V-2 system were launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, in 1950. Von Braun's work was instrumental in the success of early space exploration missions, which were the foundation for all subsequent space exploration programs, and those inaugural Florida rocket tests ushered in the true expansion of the space program on the Space Coast.

On July 29, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act, establishing NASA. Just eight weeks later, on Sept. 22, 1958, a visionary physicist named Jerome Keuper who was working in the space program at Cape Canaveral made his own launch, of a small night school for space workers called Brevard Engineering College. This would later be renamed Florida Institute of Technology. Three years after NASA and Florida Tech were founded, NASA requested appropriations for initial land purchases on Merritt Island to support the Apollo Lunar Landing Program. This land would eventually become Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Since December 1968, KSC has been NASA's primary launch center for human spaceflight, and it has been the starting point for some of history's most amazing technological achievements—from the Apollo missions that first put men on the moon to the space shuttle program that showed a spacecraft can be launched, returned and reused multiple times.

Fast forward to today. Spaceport America, located north of Las Cruces, was officially completed in 2011, becoming the world's first purpose-built commercial spaceport. Both it and Kennedy Space Center are on the vanguard of the new wave of commercial space flights as companies such as Virgin Galactic and SpaceX reshape what it means to be a spacefaring people. As the space program evolved over that time, Florida Tech, too, has grown and expanded, embracing the powerful blend of technology and human intellect that so ably guided the United States in its quest to explore the cosmos. There is power, too, in the partnership that has once again united New Mexico and Florida, as Burrell College, Steward Health Care and Florida Tech come together to help establish the next generation of osteopathic physicians.

