

Harold “Hal” Getzelman Biography



Harold “Hal” Duane Getzelman – Class of 1972 – b. July 9, 1954 From the EHS Yearbook, the Maroon: Football 2-3-4, Gymnastics 3-4, Golf 2, Student Council 4, Class Council 2, Ski Club 3-4.

Hal was born in Elmhurst, Illinois., graduating from Elgin High School, Elgin, Illinois in 1972. After graduating from the United States Air Force Academy in 1976 with B.S. degree in Engineering

Mechanics, he attended pilot

training in Enid, OK at Vance Air Force Base. Upon completing flight training, he joined Air Defense Command and flew as an instructor pilot in the T33A Shooting Star. Next he excelled as a Skilled Interceptor Pilot in the F106A Delta Dart and performed North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) alert duties and demonstrated proficiency in weapons system employment, aerial refueling, and as a flight lead. In the fall of 1981, during the Cold War, he personally led a two ship formation to intercept two Soviet Bombers that penetrated the Air Defense Zone off the coast of Virginia. In the spring of 1981, Hal transitioned to flying the McDonald Douglas F-15C Eagle at McChord Air Force Base. During this time, his leadership of the Squadron Intelligence office was recognized as among the best in Tactical Air Command.

In 1985, Hal earned a Master’s Degree in Space Operations from the Air Force Institute of Technology. Following graduation he was assigned to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX where he instructed Astronauts on Space Shuttle systems and led the Air Force Training Division.

Hal was reassigned to serve in Korea. Under his leadership, the Current Operations Section within the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Kunsan Air Base was rated as Outstanding by the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Inspector General. Then, Hal returned to fly the F-15C at Langley Air Force Base, and deployed in support of Operation DESERT STORM. He personally flew 10 combat missions totaling 72 hours of flight time, and his team of planners efficiently scheduled 3,057 combat sorties for the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing. During the conflict, he pioneered innovative tactics to prevent enemy aircraft from escaping to Iran. Hal’s final military assignment was as a Northrup T-38 Talon Instructor Pilot and Base Inspector General at Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, TX. He retired from the Air Force in February of 1997.

Hal then returned to Johnson Space Center to support the assembly of the International Space Station (ISS). One of his primary duties was as a key member of American and Russian experts that designed

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emergency strategies and procedures for the International Space Station (ISS). For his contributions to improvements in crew safety, he was awarded the Silver Snoopy, the highest award bestowed personally by the Astronauts. Hal was also honored as the top employee of the Barrios Corporation for 2006. In recognition of his skill and expertise on Space Station equipment and procedures, Hal was certified as one of the first non-astronaut Capsule Communicators (CapComs) whose role is the link between the astronauts on orbit and Mission Control in Houston. As a CapCom, he participated in all of the major ISS missions and was the Lead CapCom for the final assembly mission which installed Node 3 and the Cupola. Today, he serves as the Chief Engineer of the CapCom Branch where he trains and mentors all new Astronauts and Engineers who serve as CapComs.

For seventeen years, Hal served as the Director of the High Adventure Program at Boy Scout Camp Tres Ritos in New Mexico. Hal has been awarded three Meritorious Service Medals, an Air Medal, the Kuwait Liberation Medal, the Golden BEAR Award, a Silver Snoopy, the NASA Exceptional Service Medal and the NASA Exceptional Public Service Medal. He holds an Air Transport Pilot License and is a skilled parachutist, consummate woodworker, and Scuba Diver.

NASA official visits his U-46 roots - By Kerry Lester | Daily Herald Staff



Hal Getzelman - Class of 1972 visits the observatory planetarium in his old school district, Elgin Area School District U-46. Getzelman is the lead CapCom, or capsule communicator, for NASA in Houston, placing him in daily contact with the International space Station. where he works with the crew of the international space station daily. Here he checks out the vintage telescope at the observatory director Gary Kutina, left, and former director Don Tuttle, middle.

Christopher Hankins | Staff Photographer

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NASA scientist Hal Getzelman talks about his days at U-46 where he first became interested in astronomy and aerospace while visiting the district’s planetarium and observatory Friday in Elgin.

Christopher Hankins | Staff Photographer

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As a teen and budding astronomer, Hal Getzelman spent much of his time at Elgin Area School District U-46’s Observatory and Planetarium. There, under the watchful eye of longtime observatory director Don Tuttle, Getzelman learned to make his first telescope, to study the constellations and the meridian line. “In those days, students didn’t get to go up in the observatory tower much,” he said.

Today, Getzelman serves as NASA’s lead capsule communicator for the International Space Station, facilitating communications with the station’s crew on a daily basis.

In town for a wedding, the Bartlett native spoke about his work to junior high students from Larsen and Ellis middle schools in a talk also broadcast live from the Gail Borden Library on the city’s Web page. Afterward, Getzelman had the chance to return to the place in Elgin that inspired his career. And this time, he even got to head up to the tower. Together with Tuttle and several U-46 administrators, Getzelman first sat in the darkened planetarium as the star projector beamed the moon, stars and even the International Space Station onto the ceiling above. Afterward, the group climbed the observatory’s stairs and current director Gary Kutina cracked open the pumpkin-shaped dome and took out the observatory’s old telescope. The observatory, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in February, 2010, originally was built to set precise time for the Elgin Watch Factory. In 1960, with setting time via telescope considered outdated, the factory gave the observatory to U-46. It added on a planetarium in 1963, Tuttle said. Getzelman, said the space race of the 1960’s and the Cold War naturally drew many students, including himself, to studying the skies. “I felt lucky to have gotten to see this in middle and high school,” he said. While it’s often harder to interest students in the subject today, U-46 still has an edge. U-46 Math and Science Coordinator Jennifer McDonnell said the district will be looking for grants to rehabilitate the observatory, so students and community members can better tour the entire building. She also said lessons on space will be added to the eighth-grade curriculum. “I think there’s a renewed interest,” she said.