

Skyrocketing HOPES

By Michael Candelaria

WITH SIGHTS SET HIGH, SPACE FLORIDA SEEKS TO TAKE FLIGHT ON THE WINGS OF ITS COMMERCIAL LAUNCH ZONE.



Steve Kohler

Florida Governor Charlie Crist (third from left) was among the attendees at the dedication ceremony for Launch Complex 36.

» Steve Kohler had only been on the job less than a year, but he saw the writing on the wall. Actually, it was stenciled in the sky.

In May 2006, the Florida Legislature passed the Space Florida Act, consolidating Florida's three space entities (Florida Space Authority, Florida Space Research Institute and Florida Aerospace Finance Corp.) into a single new organization: Space Florida, with Kohler taking the helm in October 2006. Created as a special district, Space Florida would serve as the single point of contact for all space-related functions in the state, encompassing civil, military and commercial areas.

The problem was that commercial appeal sorely was lacking, not only across Florida but nationwide.

During the previous decade, the U.S. market share for commercial launches had spiraled from 80 percent to roughly 10 percent. Space Florida, including Kennedy Space Center and Cape

Canaveral Air Force Station, either could be part of that problem or part of the solution. Secure in the knowledge that civil launches would be a continual go and that a "fair share" of military launches would come his way, Kohler chose the latter.

"There wasn't an 'aha' moment [about commercial launches]," he says. "It was a trend of reckoning that went back 10 years.

"We really see the commercialization of space as the most rapidly growing sector, as the commercial industries of the world see the value and profitability that can be generated."

Kohler, though, isn't sitting back, waiting for takeoff. He is, in his words, "incentivizing" to accelerate Space Florida's flight. "We needed to create a compelling reason for the payload



**The Space Life Sciences Lab
at Kennedy Space Center.**



customers and the launch vehicle users to want to be here," he asserts.

As the calendar turns to spring 2009, mission one is establishing a Commercial Launch Zone, a move further hastened by phaseout of the shuttle program. Initially set for spring 2010, the shuttle's retirement could be delayed until that fall. Still, there isn't much time left to fill a significant void. Notably, a replacement to the shuttle, called Constellation, could be ready to operate as early as 2014, but there are no certainties about the program.

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As Kohler describes it, the Commercial Launch Zone, or CLZ, isn't as much a physical area at the Cape as it is a strategy intended to create a more competitive business environment for companies involved in the aerospace sector. He plans to build it using tax incentives as a foundation and access to the International Space Station as a chief pillar.

Last August, that effort received a booster rocket in the form of rights to Launch Complex 36. The U.S. Air Force announced that subject to completion of the environmental impact analysis process, Launch Complex 36 at Cape Canaveral would be rebuilt as a multi-use vertical launch complex capable of supporting several launch vehicle configurations. The complex had been opened by NASA in 1961 and most recently was used as a military and commercial Atlas launch site. The final rockets launched in 2004. Kohler expects reconstruction to begin before summer,

with launch activities possibly commencing late next year.

As a result, more than ever before, the possibility of regular commercial launches happening on Central Florida's coast is real. And, for metro Orlando, the benefits are evident in more than mere proximity, particularly for biotech companies. Kohler envisions a space-based biotech corridor that stretches from the International Space Station to Earth-based facilities and resources such as the Space Life Sciences Lab at Kennedy Space Center. There is precedent, too. Space Shuttle

Mission STS-123, launched in March 2008, hosted salmonella research that validated results of experiments from shuttle mission STS-115 two years earlier. Kohler's belief is that biotech leaders in metro Orlando, such as the Burnham Institute for Medical Research, will broaden that activity.

Already, Burnham occupies a portion of the Space Life Sciences Lab's roughly 100,000 square feet. Burnham, which this spring moves teams of scientists who study diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and drug discovery into a permanent headquarters facility at Lake Nona, utilizes an approach to medical research that involves scientists from different disciplines assembling in teams to accelerate research. Research in space is a potential element of that approach, Kohler contends, largely by virtue of that lab, which is officially recognized as an integral connecting point with the Space Station and features superior payload-


prep capabilities for Space Station experiments.

Dr. Daniel Kelly, scientific director of Burnham, affirms that point.

"Burnham Institute for Medical Research at Lake Nona has prioritized translational research and committed technology resources so that our basic science discoveries can advance toward application at a faster pace," he says. "Collaboration with other scientific organizations, such as Space Florida, can attract the attention of investors and speed commercialization of the most promising projects."

Beyond launch activity and research, there are potential metro Orlando partnerships in activities such as construction and space tourism, as well. One recent partnership involved Lockheed Martin's work on the building out of the operations and checkout facility at Kennedy Space Center.

Kohler also acknowledges a mutually beneficial relationship, with metro Orlando providing a talent pool that is critical to Space Florida's success. "The inherent understanding that the central region has for space is unique in the country," he comments.

His hopes are, well, high for metro Orlando and, mostly, for Space Florida's commercial appeal. And the sky isn't even the limit. 

"POPE SCOPE" COULD SETTLE HERE

Space Florida officials are in discussion to obtain a world-class telescope from the Vatican. The telescope would be donated for educational purposes. Among the issues to be resolved is the cost of transporting the telescope to Kennedy Space Center.