



May 1, 2009, marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of our Center, and July 20, 2009, the 40th anniversary of the first human landing on the Moon. Just a few days after the latter, the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter – NASA’s first mission in our modern era return to the Moon – entered lunar orbit. As I thought about the significance of these events for humanity and for me, personally, I couldn’t help but to wonder what it means today, when greater than 50% of the AETD population wasn’t even born during these events.

When I was growing up, I enjoyed looking at the Moon and into the dark, star-studded skies and wonder what’s out there. I was 6 years young when President Kennedy announced to the Nation that we would land a man on the Moon and bring him back safely before the end of the decade. I got to see the beginning of it and experience it with my own eyes and all my senses. In addition to the early morning cartoons, one of my favorite programs on TV was the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration Report. They were half hour documentary snippets of discoveries in space and aeronautics research. I was in love with rockets, airplanes, and space travel and fascinated by the questions that NASA scientists and engineers asked of themselves. I wanted to be part of that experience. At the time, I had no clue in what role, but I wanted to be part of it. To me, a career in engineering or medicine (don’t ask me why) would be the ticket. So much so, that when the opportunity came along to interview for a career with NASA in 1978, I applied for jobs at every one of its Centers. I was fortunate enough that Goddard was the first of the NASA Centers to invite me for an interview for a job in the Mechanical Integration and Verification Section. My first assignment was with the Heat Capacity Mapping Mission team. Four months later, I was travelling to the Western Test Range in Lompoc, California, for my first launch. Watching the Scout rocket lift off with our spacecraft and receiving its first bits of data, confirmed the passion I felt for the NASA work.

Thirty-one years later, the experiences have been numerous with every new experience even more rewarding than the previous one. The missions of the past are too many to enumerate, but this year’s accomplishments are certainly reminders of how exciting it is to be part of it. This year, we launched NOAA-N’, LRO, and GOES-O successfully, and completed one of the most amazing missions in the history of the Agency – the HST-SM4 mission. The Express Logistics Carriers (ELC) and SDO will follow later in the year. To those that were here when the Apollo astronauts landed on the Moon, keep enjoying the ride. To those that were born after, I hope you are as excited and passionate as I was when I first started. This is a heck of a fun job, and we need you to keep the dream alive.

Orlando Figueroa
Director of AETD