

FAU colors along for shuttle ride

Graduate set to take banner into space

By Scott Travis
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Astronaut Steve Swanson expects to lift off from Cape Canaveral tonight with a piece of Florida Atlantic University on board.

Swanson, 46, is an FAU alumnus who will be a mission specialist on the 11-day Atlantis voyage, the first shuttle flight of 2007. He'll have with him a blue and silver FAU banner with alumni pins attached. Swanson, whose home is in Steamboat Springs, Colo., received a master's degree in computer systems from FAU in 1986.

The launch, scheduled for 7:38 p.m., was booked for March but was delayed by a hailstorm that pummeled Atlantis on its launchpad in February.

FAU officials have been greatly anticipating the launch for the past year.

"Isn't it great to know that someone as busy as an astronaut preparing to go into space would want to make his alma mater part of that historic experience?" FAU President Frank Brogan said in a Sept. 19 "State of the University" speech.

Swanson secured tickets for 10 FAU employees and alumni to watch the flight from a designated viewing area. The group will include several faculty and administrators from the College of Engineering, where he received his degree, said Pat Breman, assistant vice president for alumni relations.

Swanson called Breman in the fall asking whether he could take something from FAU into space with him. Breman hopes Swanson can visit FAU in the autumn to return the banner, which the university would then frame and hang in an alumni center now under construction.

She said Swanson will likely be inducted into FAU's alumni Hall of Fame. She is not aware of any other astronaut alumni.

"He serves as a role model and an inspiration for fellow alumni and current and future students as well," she said. "This is really outstanding for a university as young as FAU. He certainly instills pride in all of us."

FAU opened in 1964.

Swanson received a bachelor's degree from Colorado University-Boulder in 1983. After getting his master's at FAU, he received a doctorate from Texas A&M University. Before joining NASA, he worked as a software engineer for GTE in Phoenix. He was selected as an astronaut candidate in 1998.

Information from the Orlando Sentinel was used in this report.