



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Woodstock Challenger Learning Center to celebrate 25th Anniversary with Sept. 10 Open House

Twenty-five years ago, a group of Woodstock fifth-graders took their first flight into space. Today, that mission continues to ignite students' imaginations across Northern Illinois as the Woodstock Challenger Learning Center celebrates its silver anniversary.

'It's exciting to reflect on a quarter-century of igniting young minds with STEM career possibilities here in Woodstock, and we're grateful to District 200 for keeping the mission alive,' said Denise Brock, director of the Woodstock Challenger Learning Center.

The Center, located in the back of Olson Elementary School, 720 W. Judd St., will host an anniversary open house on Thursday, Sept. 10 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The public is invited to attend the free celebration.

The event will feature Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger, a retired astronaut and educational speaker. Selected by NASA in 2004, Metcalf-Lindenburger had a distinguished career. As a mission specialist on STS-131, she served as a flight engineer, operated the robotic arm, and coordinated spacewalks during a 15-day ISS resupply mission.

Later, she commanded the 16th NASA Extreme Environment Mission Operation in 2012, testing asteroid exploration techniques in the Aquarius Reef Habitat. She retired from the Astronaut Corps in 2014, leaving a legacy of significant contributions to space exploration.

Other special guests include two alumni of the Woodstock Challenger Center: NASA Flight Director Chris Dobbins, who visited the Center as a fifth-grader and returned for camps and to volunteer, and Madeline Huff, an intern with biotech firm Kivo. STEM activities for kids and tours of the facility will also be available.

Following the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger tragedy, the crew's families established a living memorial dedicated to educational advancement. This initiative became the Challenger Learning Center concept, a national network of educational facilities utilizing interactive space-flight simulations.

Today, Challenger Learning Centers operate across North America and beyond, fulfilling the original crew's mission to inspire future generations of students to explore science, innovate, and reach for the stars.

Woodstock's Challenger Learning Center was established in 2000 as the 44th Challenger Center, through community passion and significant private donations. Clay Street School fifth-graders flew the first "Rendezvous with a Comet" mission on September 18, 2001.

Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 acquired the Center from Aurora University in the summer of 2019 and renovated unused classrooms at Olson School to recreate the Center.

For more information, contact the Challenger Learning Center at 815-338-7722 or email challenger@wcusd200.org.