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El Camino College Alumnus to Join Space Shuttle Mission

El Camino College alumnus and Air Force Col. Michael Fincke was recently named by NASA as a crew member for an upcoming space shuttle mission to the International Space Station.

The flight will deliver the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, or AMS, to the station. The AMS is a state-of-the-art cosmic ray particle physics detector designed to examine fundamental issues about matter and the origin and structure of the universe.

Fincke is one of three mission specialists for the flight, which will include three spacewalks and the installation of the AMS to the exterior of the space station, using both the shuttle and station arms. The AMS will be attached to the right side of the station's truss, or backbone. Navy Capt. Mark Kelly will command the STS-134 mission, with retired Air Force Col. Gregory H. Johnson serving as the pilot.

Fincke is a veteran of two long-duration missions aboard the space station. He served as the NASA science officer and flight engineer on Expedition 9, and commander for Expedition 18. He was born in Pittsburgh and considers Emsworth, Pa., his hometown.

He has an Associate of Science degree from El Camino College, two bachelor's degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and master's degrees from Stanford University and the University of Houston, Clear Lake.

Fincke was the featured speaker at the 2005 El Camino College Space Science Day, an event designed to inspire area youngsters about the science of space. Fincke presented a lecture geared toward the student audience and then opened the discussion to an informal question and answer session. Space Science Day is organized by the Astronaut Ellison S. Onizuka Memorial Committee, a group that works to honor Onizuka, a NASA astronaut who died along with six others in the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986.

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