

# Florida Times-Union

JACKSONVILLE, FL

© 2003 — 138th Year — Number 35 — 6 Sections

## Field trip to space center became extraordinary day

Students involved in project for space station

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**I**t's doomed to be another one of those infamous days in U.S. history. One that people will remember 10 and 20 years from now.

For several First Coast students, they were there, at the Kennedy Space Center, where seven astronauts were supposed to arrive safely Saturday morning.

"It didn't feel real at all," said Amanda Nelson-Duac, a St. Augustine High School junior. "You just kept watching the sky because it's not supposed to not come back."

But space shuttle Columbia never did come back to Cape Canaveral.

Hundreds of people at the Kennedy Space Center listening for the sonic boom instead soon heard an announcement that mission control had lost contact with Columbia. Then another announcement that the shuttle had fallen apart over Texas. Then another that a search and rescue mission had begun.

"There was a big group of people watching for it," said Jennifer Wiseman, a St. Augustine High junior. "It was just a normal day until they started announcing things. Everything was really quiet after that."

Nelson-Duac, Wiseman and two other St. Augustine High School juniors were on a field

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## Trip: Students work on crystal project

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trip involving students across Florida helping prepare protein crystals to go on space station missions.

Small groups of students from Terry Parker High School and Stanton College Preparatory School in Jacksonville and from Orange Park Christian Academy also were scheduled to participate in the program over the weekend.

Some students, such as those from St. Augustine, were scheduled to visit the center Saturday and then prepare the crystals Sunday. Some of the other students, including those from Terry Parker, were scheduled to prepare their crystals Saturday.

Robert Smith, chairman of

the science department at Terry Parker, said his students had already started their crystal preparations Saturday morning and hadn't planned to watch the shuttle land. But they began to wonder what was going on when they didn't hear the sonic boom. They soon found out but didn't let it affect their project.

"We were selected to do a mission," Smith said. "We talked for 10 to 15 minutes about it and then continued with our work."

Orange Park Christian Academy physical science teacher Kevin Simmons and two of his students stayed in their hotel room because of the shuttle accident.

The crystals are kept frozen and are then thawed in space

because they form better when there's very little gravity. The protein crystals then are analyzed for possible medical use, said Linda Torres, a biology teacher at St. Augustine High School who took her four students on the field trip.

The crystals the students prepared over the weekend were supposed to go on shuttle Endeavor's mission in May, but now it's unclear when they'll go.

Torres bought the last three Columbia mission number STS 107 lapel pins left in a gift shop. One of the pins was stuck to the lanyard hanging around her neck yesterday.

Another pin shone from Wiseman's white polo shirt and the third was pinned to the

jacket of Beth Hubley, another student who had gone on the trip.

The girls used a video camera to record their trip.

"There were shocked looks or just about everyone's faces you saw," said St. Augustine High junior Allyson Stoller.

"It was just like the entire town was taking a day of rest for the astronauts and their families," Nelson-Duac said.

The girls said they're still considering careers in science possibly related to the space program, but none of them has ever seriously wanted to go into space.

Staff writers Cynthia L. Garza and Nin-Hai Tseng contributed to this report.

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