

Space geek gets to watch shuttle launch

By Michael J. Solender
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As bucket-list items go, getting a two-day behind-the-scenes look at NASA's final space shuttle launch is about as difficult a ticket as one could hope for.

Yet that is exactly what local communications strategist Desiree Kane snagged.

Kane, a social-media consultant, is one of only 150 Twitter people nationwide selected to participate in NASA's tweetup at Florida's Kennedy Space Center July 7 and 8.

A tweetup is an informal meeting of people who use the social messaging service Twitter. The tweetup is an opportunity to learn more about NASA, explore the Kennedy Space Center and experience a space shuttle launch. Tweetups will give those who follow NASA on Twitter an opportunity to speak with NASA managers, astronauts, shuttle technicians and engineers. The event also will provide participants the chance to meet NASA's social media team and other followers.

Kane, a "giant technology nerd and space junkie," was selected from more than 5,000 applicants who scurried to meet a 24-hour application window earlier this spring. She was notified by email in mid-June about her selection.

"I kept rereading the email because I just couldn't believe it," recalled Kane. "When I realized it was real, I immediately called my father in Las Vegas. We both registered and share a fascination with all things NASA, I'll be meeting him in Florida, and while the tweetup experience is only for me, he's coming for the launch, something we've wanted to do together for many years."

Kane, who is @Dbirdy on Twitter and co-creator of The PPL, a community for people attending and documenting the Democratic National Convention, will tweet messages and use other forms of social media such as Facebook and the local CLTBlog.com to share her perspective.

Kane, whose Twitter account has more than 15,000 tweets, has more than 2,100 followers. "I started following

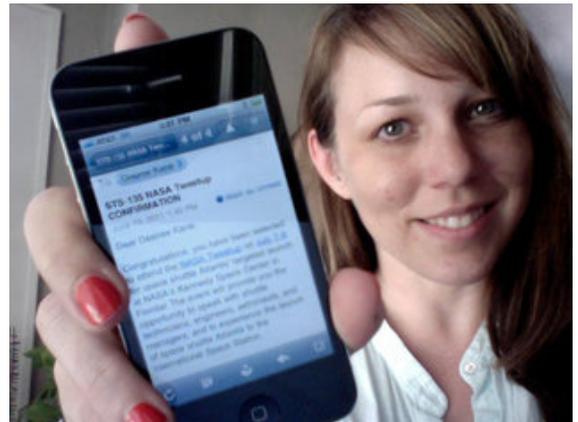
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NASA and the astronauts on Twitter almost two years ago since my interest in the space program started when I was a child," she said.

Kane, 29, has never known a world without the NASA's shuttle. She indicated that the 1986 Challenger shuttle disaster was a "seminal event and a galvanizing moment" for her and her generational peers. "Christa McAuliffe, the NASA teacher in space participant on the Challenger could have been my teacher. I remember that event so clearly, and to be able to witness the very end of an era that has made so much history is truly amazing."

The the last shuttle launch is garnering a great deal of attention. More than one million people are expected to jam the Cape for the launch, scheduled for about 11:40 A.M. July 8.

Kane will be on a special restricted-access viewing platform, where she is certain to feel, and not just see, the liftoff.

"The experience is already incredible and paying dividends," say Kane. "A private Facebook group of participants has already been established and we are sharing ideas, swapping notes on what type of video/audio equipment we are bringing and networking like crazy."

Kane has arranged with local PBS affiliate WTVI to bring special equipment down for the experience and hopes to share what she captures through the station.

"I realize social media outlets such as Twitter can be intimidating and foreign to some people," said Kane, "But they can open up entirely new worlds of information and access."

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