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## NEWS RELEASE

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### STENNIS TO LAUNCH TOURS FROM I-10 WELCOME CENTER

Jackson, Miss. -- When the redesigned Stennis Space Visitors Center reopens Memorial Day weekend, visitors will not only see 14,000 square feet of additional exciting, hands-on exhibits, but they will also get an expanded tour beginning at the Hancock County Welcome Center on I-10.

Visitors will board shuttle buses that will depart frequently from the Welcome Center. The new tour stop is a logical place to start the tours, because visitors will learn about the center's colorful history and its unique buffer zone and canal system before they enter and tour America's largest rocket test complex.

This has all been made possible through an agreement among NASA's John C. Stennis Space Center, the Mississippi Transportation Commission and the Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development, Division of Tourism. A new building, to be constructed at the I-10 Welcome Center, will serve as the point of origin for all Stennis tours.

"We consider NASA's use of the I-10 Welcome Center in Hancock County to be an important step in increasing the volume and enhancing the value of Mississippi tourism efforts," J.C. Burns, executive director, Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development, said. "This will capitalize on the over 700,000 tourists who visit this particular Welcome Center annually."



"This arrangement allows more extensive use of the Welcome Center facilities and a means to add additional parking that can be set aside for tour buses," Wayne Brown, Mississippi transportation commissioner, Southern District, said.

"With this agreement, the state will offer Stennis Space Center more visibility, and our unique federal city will, in turn, foster a high-tech image of the state," Roy Estess, space center director, said. "The willingness of both the Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development and the Mississippi Highway Commission to work with Stennis to make this vision of expansion and growth become a reality is an example of the spirit of true cooperation that leads Mississippi today."

The new tour stop at the Welcome Center will be staffed and will feature exhibits and information about NASA and other agencies located at Stennis Space Center, as well as serve as a starting point for the tours. A full-scale model of a Lunar Lander Vehicle, once used as a trainer for Apollo mission, will also be on display to help tell the story that many Mississippians played a vital role in putting Americans on the Moon.

When the Visitors Center reopens, guests will be able to dine inside the center in the new space-themed restaurant, "Rocketeria," operated by the owners of Mary's Drive Inn in Biloxi and shop in an expanded gift shop. Visitors can operate the controls of a Space Shuttle cockpit; go on board a replica of a module of the International Space Station; and experience a motion-simulated mission to Mars, as well as many other exciting exhibits.

Other highlights are exhibits at the Visitors Center portraying the roles of the many agencies at Stennis Space Center. Especially noteworthy is a major new exhibit developed by the Navel Meteorology and Oceanography Command that features an under the sea experience as well as a weather forecasting center.

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