

Local travel agent launches career as space tourism ambassador

by Andy Phelan
andy@dekalbchamp.com

Hurling into space at four times the speed of sound, 75 miles above the earth seems a bit far-fetched unless you catch a ride with NASA astronauts leaving their pad from Cape Canaveral.

Now thanks to the intrepid entrepreneur **Richard Bran-son** and his spin-off company Virgin Galactic, space travel for the masses might arrive sooner than most could have imagined. Virgin, best known as luxury travel and mega music company, is now selling trips into space for the everyday consumer.

In fact, Atlanta travel agent **Jennifer Campbell** can make it happen.

Campbell, 40, who lives in the Lake Claire district in DeKalb, is one of only 45 accredited "space agents" on the planet. It's a coincidence what she is selling is out of this world.

"You take off like a plane," said Campbell. "The spaceship is attached to the mother ship that flies to 50,000 feet. Then, the spaceship is released and a hybrid rocket takes over, shooting you into space."

While the total flight time would be relatively brief, the whole adventure is a three-day experience. Flights will take off and land at a spaceport in California's Mohave Desert.



Jennifer Campbell, one of only 45 accredited space travel agents on the planet, is selling vacations that are, well, out of this world.

Later, the company plans to open a permanent commercial site in New Mexico called "Spaceport America," according to Galactic's Web site.

Campbell said up to six people would be able to ride at one time. Once you reach your destination in sub orbit,

tourists will have 360-degree views and be able to see 1,000 miles in every direction. Once in space, the engines will be turned off allowing tourists to experience the infinite silence.

Oh, and there's that thing called gravity that will disappear for just a few minutes,

which will allow tourists to experience the serene floating feeling of weightlessness.

"It's so exciting," said Campbell, who hopes to catch a ride to space one day. "It's just an honor to be a part of this pioneering experience."

While Virgin is drastically cutting the expense – the last civilian flight into space cost \$20 million – tickets for the

dream trip start at \$200,000. To date, about 500 people have traveled into space in the last 50 years, but Virgin expects to do that in less than three.

Campbell said she hasn't sold any trips yet, "but I've received a couple of nibbles."

Test flights begin later this year with the first trips expected in late 2008. More than 200 people have already purchased their first-class space slots.

Galactic will use the ground-breaking technology and engineering know-how of **Burt Rutan**, who created SpaceShipOne, the first privately funded craft to reach space. In 2004, Rutan won the coveted Ansari X Prize by flying SpaceShipOne into space twice within a two-week span.

The vehicle tourists will ride into space on will be called SpaceShipTwo.

Travel changed Campbell's life, she said, helping her understand the world better. As trips into space become more routine and thousands see the planet for the first time from space, Campbell said she hopes people will begin to see how delicate life is on Earth and take better care of the planet.

"As **Mark Twain** said, 'travel is fatal to bigotry, narrow mindedness and ignorance.'"

For more information, log onto Virgin Galactic's Web site at www.virgingalactic.com or Virtuoso Travel at www.virtuoso.com/us.

DeKalb County youth celebrate life and legacy of Herman J. Russell

For the past 50 years, entrepreneur and civic leader **Herman J. Russell**,

founder and chairman of H.J. Russell and Company, has epitomized the meaning of entrepreneurship and success. From Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport to Centennial Olympic Park/Turner Field, City Hall, the Georgia Dome and the Georgia-Pacific headquarters, the work of Russell's construction and real estate development company can be seen all across the city of Atlanta and beyond. He has not

only made an impact on the skyline of Atlanta, but also on the hearts and lives of many who call Atlanta their

home.



Russell

On Thursday, March 15, a group of 30 young students in the IMAGE (I Must Achieve the Goal to Excel) Programs Inc., a non-profit after-school program, will host a play to celebrate Russell's life. The play, *Honoring the Life and Legacy of HJ Russell*, will take place at Sammie E. Coan Middle School starting at 6:30 p.m.

The production consists of four scenes that chronicle Russell's life from childhood to present day. Scene one focuses on Russell's early life, including the purchase of his first parcel of land at age 16 on

which he built a duplex. Scene two covers the 1950s and 1960s, including his graduation from Tuskegee University and his marriage to **Otelia Hackney**. The third scene looks at his life during the 1970s and what was going on in the world during that time. The final scene focuses on his three children and the continuation of his legacy.

"My father and our entire family are honored that the staff, students and volunteers at IMAGE Programs Inc. have dedicated their annual play to the life and legacy of my father," said **Donata Russell Major**, vice chair of Concessions International, LLC (a company owned by Herman Russell) and board member of IMAGE. "So often we wait until our legends and loved ones are gone to let them how

much they mean to us. This tribute is a great way to say thank you and have an opportunity for my father to say you're welcome in return."

IMAGE Programs Inc. is a non-profit organization that focuses on community building, education and social development for members of the Edgewood Court Community. It is a multifaceted, structured, out-of-school-time program, that provides opportunities for children ages 6-12 to improve their academic outcomes, engage in cultural, recreational and youth leadership development activities that increase their life outcomes. The play is free and open to the public. For more information about IMAGE, contact **Maurice Shaffer** at imageafterschool@yahoo.com or visit online at www.imageafterschool.org.



Subscribe to **The Champion**
Call **404-373-7779 ext 100**