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Monday, Oct. 24, 2011

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Space Launch System is key to Stennis' future

By MICHAEL NEWSOM - mmnewsom@sunherald.com

STENNIS SPACE CENTER -- After 50 years of testing rockets, John C. Stennis Space Center personnel will be busy for decades to come with what's been hailed as the most powerful rocket ever built-- a propulsion system that could be taken to Mars and other parts of the solar system.

It was 50 years ago today NASA officials announced their intention to test rockets in Hancock County as part of the Apollo program, which ended in the early 1970s.

From 1975 until 2009, NASA tested the main engines used to propel the space shuttle on its 8.5 mile ascent into orbit.



PHOTO COURTESY NASA StenniSphere, the John C. Stennis Space Center's visitor center in Hancock County, features a 14,000-square-foot museum and outdoor exhibits about Stennis Space Center, and host about 36,000 visitors a year.

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GALLERY: Space Shuttle program fueled Stennis growth

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Got Questions?

But four years ago, NASA announced construction of a new test stand at Stennis that would be used to test the newest rocket engines.

Those engines are to be used on the Space Launch System, which could be used to take humans to beyond "low Earth" orbit again.

The announcement four years ago made it clear NASA was planning to stay in South Mississippi -- home to the largest rocket engine testing facility in the United States-- for decades to come.

"What I predict is the Space Launch System is going to be another 30 to 40 years of engine tests," said Patrick Scheuermann, John C. Stennis Space Center director.

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The first Space Launch System flight is expected to take place in 2017, but some of the testing has already begun.

Workers will use the A-3 Test Stand, which is the first test-firing structure to be built on the site since the 1960s. It will give NASA a place to test rockets that are built to start in space, rather than on Earth. This will require a 300-foot tall steel structure outfitted with chemical steam generators used to simulate conditions at altitudes of up to 100,000 feet. NASA leaders say the test stand also will allow them to test rockets in a simulated setting that would have them fire for the same amount of time they would during the actual flights. It also would allow them to rotate the engines in the same way they would move during a mission.

NASA said the Space Launch System is the first exploration vehicle since the Saturn V rocket of the Apollo program, which took man to the moon in 1969. It has superior "lift capability" and it will expand NASA's reach into the solar system to allow exploration of the area between Earth and the moon, "near-Earth asteroids, Mars and its moons and beyond."

More than rocket testing


The Space Launch System is a major development for Stennis, but rocket testing isn't all that's done there. Today, more than 30 government agencies, academic institutions and private businesses have operations there, including the U.S. Navy, The Department of the Interior and Rolls Royce North America, among others. Mississippi State University's Northern Gulf Institute and the University of Southern Mississippi's Department of Marine Sciences are both based at Stennis. It's also home to the largest concentration of oceanographers in the world, which includes the Naval Oceanographic Office, NASA officials said.

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 anderson3640

I really don't care how high, how far, how much thrust, or any of the other measurements. I only see the jobs being filled to bring this to fruition.

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the \$L\$ is TOO expensive, bad designed and will fly for the first test only around 2020-2022 when China already will be on the Moon with a manned outpost

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TerryMoore

Maybe the Chinese can set-up the first lunar gas station too!

10/25/2011 07:31 AM in reply to [] BreakingNewsBlog [] 1 Like Report Abuse

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skodrin

Make sure it's a "Full Service" gas station so they can clean the Moondust off of my windshield when I pull in. :)

10/25/2011 09:18 AM in reply to TerryMoore Report Abuse

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word , word up

LEO starts at 8.5 miles and is up to 1,240 miles. The SLS will be capable of travel beyond the confines of Earths gravity.

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msmadness

Um...8.5 miles is 44,800 ft...never new I was in earth orbit. Technically, LEO starts at the earth's surface, but aerodynamic drag prevents anything for truly orbiting; so, most begin LEO at 100 mi. The writer is absolutely clueless about how the shuttle's main engines work. The engines work until orbit insertion (according to NASA)...100-217 mi.

10/25/2011 07:44 AM in reply to word 1 Like Report Abuse

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the_big_kahuna

Emphasis mine:

*From 1975 until 2009, NASA tested the main engines used to propel the space shuttle on **its 8.5 mile ascent into orbit.***

Uh, low-earth orbit is a little bit higher than 8.5 miles.

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