

The Northern Virginia Daily

Teen takes interest in space to next level



Rian Dougherty, of Front Royal, recently attended the Advanced Space Academy at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Courtesy photo

FRONT ROYAL – Rian Dougherty may have his feet on the ground, but his head is still in space.

Summer break is over, but for the 15-year-old Front Royal resident, the excitement of attending Space Camp is still on his mind.

“I went because I’m really interested in space,” said Rian. Particularly, he says he’s been interested in astronomy and space for as long as he can remember.

Rian recently attended the Advanced Space Academy at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama after learning about the program from a fellow classmate.

For six days, Rian trained with a team of other students like himself that flew a simulated space mission to the International Space Station. Once aboard, Rian and crew participated in experiments and successfully completed extra-vehicular activities or spacewalks.



Days at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama were packed from dawn to dusk

with activities like scuba diving for Rian Dougherty, of Front Royal, Courtesy photo

Days were packed from dawn to dusk with activities, Rian explained. Simulated missions were created where they pretended they were on Mars.

“We were given various tasks to complete,” he said. “Sometimes we were able to complete them, other times we weren’t because of anomalies, like medical scenarios.”

Other activities included zip lining and scuba diving.

More than 750,000 trainees have graduated from Space Camp since its creation in 1982, including STS-131 astronaut Dottie Metcalf-Linderburger, European Space Agency astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti, and Kate Rubins, who launched to the International Space Station this summer.

When asked what his favorite part of camp was, Rian described a few activities: *“the zero-gravity chairs, with springs on them so you felt like you were on the moon; the multi access trainer that would spin you around, but doesn’t make you sick because your stomach is at the center of gravity – it just feels like you’re accelerating really fast; and being the commander of the International Space Center, where I worked with a crew of four and PAYCOM, the Payload Communications Manager. Here we learned how PAYCOM enables researchers from around the world to speak to the crew on the space station.”* All in all, Rian said his experience was *“pretty cool”* and he can’t wait to go back next summer.

Rian is a sophomore at Wakefield Country Day School where he’s a member of the cross-country team and participates in Cyber Patriot Aregos activities. He’s also a Boy Scout. He said he hopes to attend Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he wants to study computer science and electrical engineering. His interest comes from

taking things apart and rebuilding them.

“I’ve been building things for most of my life,” he said. “Or taking them apart and then putting them back together” he added, laughing.

Correction: This story has been updated to reflect that Rian Dougherty is a Front Royal resident.



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