

Former ISS Crew Members on Hand for Ham Radio Contact with ISS



Pete Norloff, KG4OJT, holds the microphone as Layne asks Suni Williams how and when she decided she wanted to be an astronaut.



Virginia Run Elementary School students gather to await the start of the ham radio contact with ISS crew member Suni Williams, KD5PLB.

NEWINGTON, CT, Mar 6, 2007 -- Technical problems failed to dampen the enthusiasm of youngsters at Virginia Run Elementary School in Centreville, Virginia, who spoke March 2 via ham radio with International Space Station flight engineer Suni Williams, KD5PLB. The Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) program arranged the direct VHF contact. For reasons still being looked into, the space station's NA1SS and Earth station K4HTA failed to establish solid communication until more than three minutes into the approximately ten-minute pass. Nonetheless, not only did Williams answer all the students' questions but had time to let the youngsters know how much she enjoyed the opportunity.

"It's a great honor and privilege to be here and be talking to you guys," Williams said as the contact drew to a close. "I know you've done a lot of work and a lot of research to get this contact done. I hope you've learned a lot."

Food is a favorite topic for students when they speak with ISS crew members. This contact was no exception. One youngster wanted to know how the ISS crew members eat in space. Williams said it's not always easy.

"It is a little bit difficult to eat because everything flies around," she responded. "But luckily it's stuff that's usually stuck together, like some type of casserole, and we have it in a can so it doesn't get too far away. Sometimes we have to catch it, though." Williams pointed out that the ISS crew doesn't have to prepare its meals, just heat them up, if necessary.

Williams told another youngster that the biggest surprise she's had aboard the ISS was discovering how difficult it is to relax in space and sleep easily.

"I felt like I needed a bed or something to lay down on, but there's nothing much to lay down on," Williams said. "We sleep in sleeping bags, and the sleeping bags are tied to the wall so you don't go anywhere, but I had a hard time relaxing my neck because I didn't have a pillow and didn't have that sense of having a pillow or something I was laying down to."

Augmenting the ARISS experience for the Virginia Run

[CLICK HERE](#) to listen to youngsters at Virginia Run



ISS Expedition 4 crew member Carl Walz, KC5TIE, talked to the Virginia Run students as part of the ARISS contact event at the school.

pupils, ISS Expedition 4 crew member Carl Walz, KC5TIE, and Expedition 3 crew commander Frank Culbertson, KD5OPQ, were on hand at the school, located some 20 miles west of Washington, DC, to discuss their experiences and answer additional questions. Both took part in ARISS school contacts while they were in space.

Elementary School speak with ISS crew member Suni Williams, KD5PLB, at NA1SS. [MP3, 10:23]

[CLICK HERE](#) to view a Virginia Wireless Society video of the Virginia Run Elementary School ARISS event.

Members of the Vienna Wireless Society (VWS) set up the Earth station at the school, and the club loaned its call sign for the occasion. The VWS's Pete Norloff, KG4OJT, was the event organizer and tended the microphone for the youngsters queued up to pose their questions. Reporters from two newspapers and a Washington, DC, TV station attended the event. NBC Channel 4 TV meteorologist Bob Ryan featured the contact March 5 during the evening newscast. The Fairfax County Public Schools cable channel -- Red Apple Channel 21 -- recorded the event and will replay it every day from April 9 until April 29 at 1 and 6 PM Eastern Time.



Vienna Wireless Association members installed this 2-meter antenna on the school's roof to make possible the contact between K4HTA and NA1SS. [All photographs by Linda Thomas, AC4LT]

ARRISS is an international educational outreach, with US participation by ARRL, AMSAT and NASA. -- ARRL Virginia PIC Randy Sly, W4XJ, provided information for this report

