

NASA Astronaut Eileen Collins retires

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NASA Astronaut Eileen Collins, the first woman to command a space shuttle, has announced her retirement.

Collins, the pilot of the shuttle Discovery's return to flight mission last year, plans to pursue private interests and spend more time with family.

"Eileen Collins is a living, breathing example of the best that our nation has to offer," said NASA Administrator Michael Griffin. "She is, of course, a brave, superb pilot and a magnificent crew commander. Beyond those qualities, she is both very bright and modestly self-effacing about that fact.

"And above all," added Griffin, "she is possessed of a quiet determination to attain the very highest levels of accomplishment. I am

proud to know her and will greatly miss her at NASA."

A veteran of four space flights, Collins was selected as an astronaut in 1990 and went on to become the first woman selected as a pilot astronaut, the first woman to serve as a shuttle pilot and the first woman to command a U.S. spacecraft.

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