

7 shuttle astronauts are parents of many children

August 24 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer

(AP) -- All seven astronauts on space shuttle Discovery's mission are parents, and they have 20 children among themselves.

The lone mom is the one who will be moving into the international space station for three months.

The astronauts' children range in age from 6 to 26 and include a Blackhawk helicopter pilot who's following in his father's Army-flying footsteps.

A brief look at each:

Commander Rick Sturckow was driving a tractor by himself on his family's turkey and cattle farm in Southern California when he was 7.

He was all set to become a diesel truck mechanic, then a race car engineer and designer. A professor at California Polytechnic State University encouraged him to join the Marines and become a pilot. He's now a Marine colonel making his fourth space shuttle flight.

The farm work ethic has served him well. "Growing up on a farm, that's good preparation for what we're doing" at NASA, he said.

Sturckow, 48, flew combat during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, then

went to test pilot school. He became an astronaut in 1994 and made his first space shuttle flight four years later; it was the first assembly mission for the international space station.

He and wife, Michele, a first-grade school teacher, have a 6-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter. He is from Lakeside, Calif.

Pilot Kevin Ford vividly recalls his first airplane ride back in the 1970s in Indiana. He was 13 or 14 years old and his oldest brother, David, a law student with a private pilot's license, flew into town and picked him up.

It was a calm summer morning, and it wasn't long afterward that Ford decided to become a pilot like Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins, whose autobiography he'd read. He worked in a grocery store to pay for flying lessons.

Ford joined the Air Force - he retired as a colonel last year - and flew F-15s and then test missions in F-16s. He became an astronaut in 2000. At age 49, he's one of the oldest to fly in space for the first time.

His brother, a former state senator in Indiana, died at age 59 last year of pancreatic cancer.

"One of the kind of sad things for me is he wasn't around to see the flight, but he'll know it," Ford said.

Ford and wife Kelly have two children in their 20s. He is from Montpelier, Ind.

Nicole Stott will become the first American woman to move into a space station with a young child still at home. Her son is 7.

Stott will spend three months at the [international space station](#). Husband Chris, who's also in the space business, will pick up the parenting slack just as he has during her astronaut training. She's been working overseas half the year.

"I can honestly say I would not be doing this if I didn't think it was to help improve life here on Earth for him (son) and make things better for the future for him and other kids as well," she said.

Stott, 46, grew up in Clearwater, Fla., hanging out with her airplane-building father. That led her to an aeronautical engineering degree and, in 1988, to NASA's launching site and the shuttle program. She eventually became the manager in charge of Endeavour's launch processing and the project engineer for Columbia. She moved to Johnson Space Center in Houston in 1998. Two years later, she became an astronaut.

This is her first spaceflight. She will perform the first spacewalk of Discovery's mission.

Danny Olivas, a father of five, says space is about the future.

"The whole notion of exploring and space is what we, as human beings, can fundamentally do to nurture our children's sense of awe and pushing their own envelopes," he said.

Olivas, 43, a third-generation Mexican-American who grew up in El Paso, Texas, has a doctorate degree in mechanical engineering and

materials science. He holds six patents for water valves and manufacturing processes for microelectronics.

He started his career at Dow Chemical Co., where he won a lifesaving award for dragging a woman from her wrecked car in the early 1990s. He moved to Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., and, in 1998, became an astronaut. This is his second shuttle flight. As lead spacewalker, he'll perform all three.

He and wife Marie just celebrated their 20th anniversary. Their children range in age from 6 to 14.

Jose Hernandez grew up the youngest in a family of Mexican migrant workers who revered education and overcame poverty. Now he's breaking new barriers by blasting into the final frontier.

He's already got a dinner invitation from Mexico's president.

Hernandez, 47, traveled between the Mexican state of Michoacan and California during the 1960s and 1970s with his parents and three older siblings. All worked the fields, but the children never missed school. The family eventually settled in Stockton.

Hernandez earned electrical engineering degrees and worked at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, then Johnson Space Center. He tried for 12 years to become an astronaut and finally succeeded in 2004. This is his first spaceflight; he'll haul over station supplies and become the first NASA astronaut to file bilingual Twitter updates from space as Astro-Jose.

In 2005, he started a foundation to inspire youngsters to excel in math

and science. He wants them to say, "Hey, you know, if he did it, why can't I do it?"

Wife Adela runs a Mexican restaurant in Houston. They have five children ages 6 to 14.

Patrick Forrester likes to take a nap once he's strapped into the space shuttle for launch. The only thing he's nervous about, he says, is making a mistake during the flight. He doesn't dwell on the dangers.

"You may laugh to hear me say that I don't really think about that," he said.

Forrester and wife Diana, a neonatal nurse, and their two 20-something sons - one a Blackhawk helicopter pilot who's about to deploy to Afghanistan - have a lot of faith. "God's got a plan for all of us, and so I just try to go out and do my best," he said.

This is the third spaceflight for Forrester, 52, a retired Army colonel and aviator who was born in El Paso, Texas. He's been an astronaut since 1996. He performed spacewalks on his first two missions; this time, he'll oversee the spacewalks from inside.

Forrester's grandfather and father were both Army officers. On his 2007 shuttle flight, he flew their dog tags, as well as his own and his son's. "It's a real treasure to have that collection," he said.

Swedish astronaut Christer Fuglesang returned home "a rocket star" after his first spaceflight in 2006.

As the first Swede in space - the first person of Nordic descent, actually, to fly in space - he was greeted by thousands back in his homeland and feted by the king and queen.

"Completely overwhelming," he said. This time around, he's expecting far less fanfare.

Fuglesang, 52, a physicist from Stockholm, is flying on behalf of the European Space Agency. He's been an astronaut since 1992. He will perform two spacewalks during Discovery's space station visit.

"I've always been fascinated by space," he said. "It's a kind of combination of the adventure and, the way I see it, a vision of how humans naturally learn to move farther and farther out in space."

He's taking up a traditional Swedish wooden dala horse and Swedish marshmallow candies in the shape of space shuttles. He plans to file Twitter updates from space in both Swedish and English as CFuglesang.

Wife Elisabeth also is Swedish. Their daughters are 23 and 20, and their son is 14.

On the Net:

<http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/>

Hernandez on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/astro\(underscore\)jose](http://twitter.com/astro(underscore)jose)

Fuglesang on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/CFuglesang>

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