

Craft carrying circus tycoon reaches space station

October 2 2009, By MANSUR MIROVALEV , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- A Russian spacecraft docked Friday at the International Space Station to drop off Canadian circus billionaire Guy Laliberte - dubbed the first clown in space - along with an American astronaut and Russian cosmonaut.

Two days after launching, the Soyuz TMA-16 capsule linked smoothly and on schedule with the space station orbiting 220 miles (355 kilometers) above the Earth.

Laliberte's five children and partner Claudia Barilla broke into applause after watching the ship dock on a giant screen at Russian Mission Control outside Moscow.

"Congratulations!" station commander Gennady Padalka said from inside the orbiting outpost.

Laliberte, the 50-year-old founder of Cirque du Soleil, reportedly paid \$35 million to become the world's seventh [space tourist](#). He may be the last for several years, however, as NASA retires its shuttle program and relies on Russia to ferry U.S. [astronauts](#) to the lab - limiting capsule space.

Laliberte, cosmonaut Maxim Surayev and astronaut Jeffrey Williams were joining the station's current crew of six a few hours after docking, when hatches linking the station with the Soyuz are opened.

An experienced acrobat, fire-eater and stilt-walker, Laliberte said he would wear a clown nose aboard the station, and brought several more for his crew mates to try on. He also warned he would tickle them while they sleep.

But he has a serious mission for the trip as well - delivering a message to Earth about the planet's growing shortage of clean water. He planned to read a poem dedicated to water conservation in a satellite linkup to be shown in 14 cities from Oct. 9. Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, pop singer Peter Gabriel and Irish rock group U2 will also participate.

Quebec-born Laliberte, who is worth an estimated \$2.5 billion, returns to Earth on Oct. 11 with two of the station's current crew members aboard one of three Soyuz crafts now docked at the station.

Third-time space traveler Williams, 51, and first-timer Surayev, 37, plan to stay in orbit for 169 days.

"We are really proud of him," said Surayev's wife, Anna, who watched the docking along with their two daughters. "Glad his dream came true, because it took him 12 years to achieve it."

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