

Rocketman (and woman): Elon and Gwynne, the pair who made SpaceX

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The launch of SpaceX's rocket Falcon Heavy on June 25, 2019

Space Exploration Technologies Corp.—commonly known as SpaceX—is slated to send two astronauts into space on Wednesday. Despite not yet being 20 years old, the company has already developed a

creation myth: on September 28, 2008, its first rocket Falcon 1 launched for the fourth time.

"I messed up the first three launches, the first three launches failed. Fortunately the fourth launch—that was the last money that we had—the fourth launch worked, or that would have been it for SpaceX. But fate liked us that day," said Elon Musk, the company's founder and chief engineer, in 2017.

"We started with just a few people, who didn't really know how to make rockets. The reason I ended up being the chief engineer... was not because I wanted to, it's because I couldn't hire anyone. Nobody good would join," he added.

Born in South Africa, Musk immigrated to Canada at age 17, then to the US, where he amassed his fortune in Silicon Valley with the startup PayPal.

SpaceX's aim, when it was incorporated on March 14, 2002, was to make low-cost rockets to travel one day to Mars—and beyond.

The 11th employee hired that year turned out to be someone good: Gwynne Shotwell, who was in charge of business development, soon established herself as Musk's right-hand woman.

In the space industry, the two are given the rock star privilege of only being referred to by their first names.

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