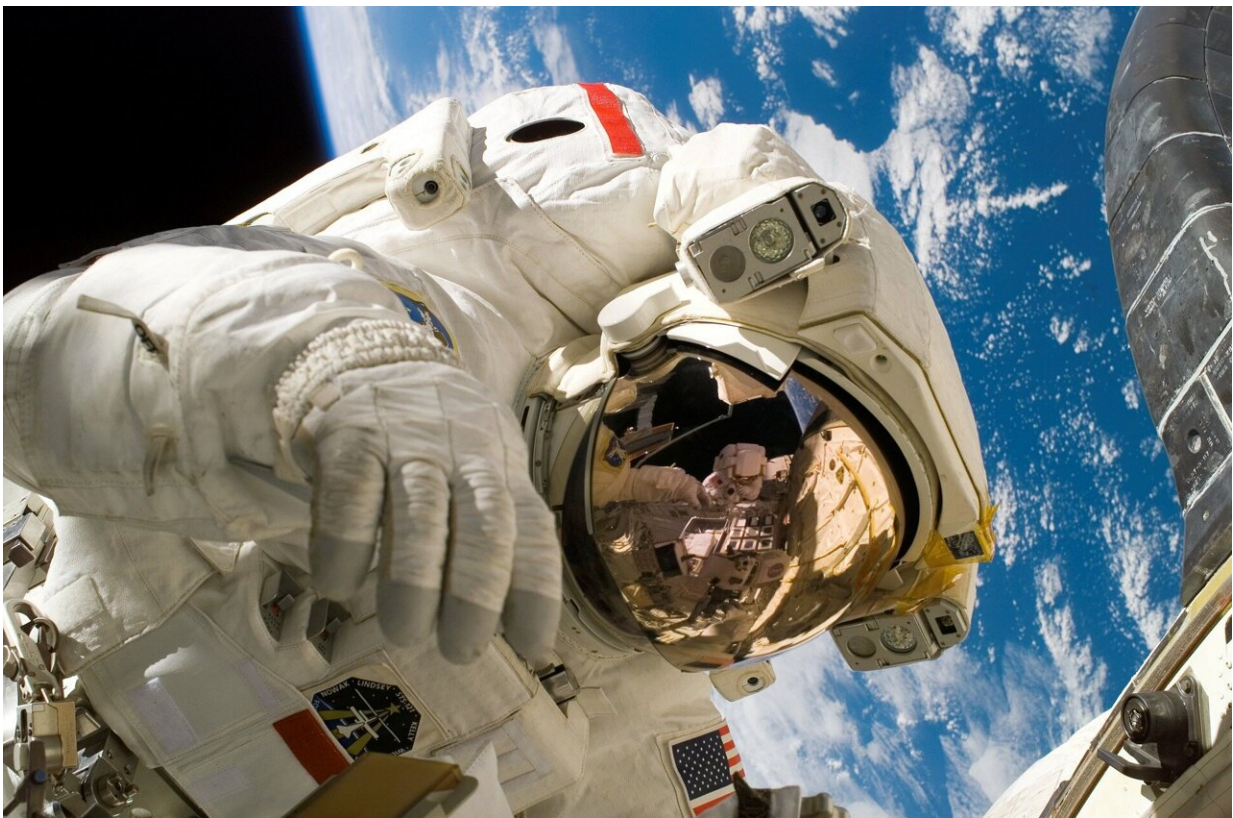


Filmmaker on a mission wants to put astronaut Sally Ride statue in Central Florida

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Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex is home to one. Space Center

Houston is another.

Lifelike bronze statues honoring some of the most famous astronauts in history have been finding homes in the space hubs and museums of America in recent years, and documentary filmmaker Steven Barber has had a major hand in each of their placements.

Now he wants to bring a statue commemorating Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, to Central Florida.

His top target is Orlando International Airport, which acknowledged the spirit behind the push, but noted any sort of approval would have to go through a process.

"While we appreciate Mr. Barber's passion in locating a monument at Orlando International to honor beloved astronaut Sally Ride, the preliminary discussions last year were just that—preliminary," according to a statement from the airport's public relations team. "Commissioned and major art pieces at Orlando International undergo a rigorous, pre-established selection process and must fall within our art program policies."

Barber was at Orlando's SpaceCom last month on his mission to drum up interest in the statue efforts but took time to revisit his first project, the Apollo 11 statue of astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins that was installed at KSC's Apollo/Saturn V Center Moon Tree Garden in 2019.

"It looks like it did the day we put it in," he said. "As you and I are speaking right now, there's 30 kids in front of the crew of Apollo 11 taking pictures, and I guarantee you that these monuments will have an effect on a kid that'll become an astronaut or go into science without a doubt."

Inspired himself by the statues, he says that's what he hopes others get out of his efforts.

"That's what these monuments do, while other Americans are ripping monuments down at a fever pitch—there's all this controversy with our past, ripping down Confederate monuments, I'm building them. I think that's kind of the juxtaposition of what's going on. I'm trying to shine the light on American exceptionalism," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, these are the greatest Americans we've ever produced."

So just where a statue of Ride remains up in the air, and Barber said he was talking with a few places in Cocoa Beach that he said had shown interest.

"It doesn't matter if it's OIA. I'll find a place in Florida. I'll find a place for her," he said. "I'm going to put Sally Ride in Florida ... She just needs to be there."

Ride made history flying on Space Shuttle Challenger on STS-7 in 1983 and again in 1984 on STS-41-G. She had been slated for a third mission before the Challenger explosion grounded the shuttle fleet in 1986. Ride retired from NASA in 1987 after serving on the Rogers Commission to investigate the disaster. She also served on the investigation team in 2003 after the Columbia tragedy. She died at the age of 61 in 2012.

Barber actually spearheaded two Ride statues already, the first of which was placed at the Cradle of Aviation Museum on Long Island in Garden City, New York, in 2022 followed by the placement of a duplicate at Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California.

The 7-foot-tall statues feature Ride wearing her flight suit as she did in the 1980s holding aloft a space shuttle orbiter model and looking to the

sky.

His success finding homes for the Ride statues followed by the original Apollo 11 effort followed with another \$750,000 raised to install an Apollo 13 monument featuring the rescued astronauts Jim Lovell, Jack Swigert and Fred Haise at Space Center Houston.

The Ride statues in New York and California each were \$300,000 efforts, but Barber says an Orlando-area version could be done for as little as \$250,000 since the mold for the statue is already made. The majority of those funds go to the sculptors, but Barber says he gets a small commission as project manager, "which allows me to buy coffee."

In each case, Barber has been able to raise funds from donors for the statues while working to secure space at the institutions for their placement and display. He's also pursuing homes for statues honoring Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman to go to space, and Guion Bluford, the first Black man in space.

While he's confident he will secure a donated home for what would be the third Ride statue, he's working concurrently to raise the \$250,000.

"It's not hard to give away a free lunch. If I could build it right now, I could put her anywhere. I could go to Orlando, I could find a million places to put her. But you know, I need to get the money first and then the location," he said.

Barber's drive for [space](#)-related memorials was born after working on documentaries since 2009. He encountered a statue done by the Lundens of Apollo 13's Swigert in Washington's National Statuary Hall Collection to represent Colorado. The Denver-born Swigert was also elected to Congress for to represent the state before his death in 1982.

"I just remember being overwhelmed by that statue," Barber said in a 2018 interview as he pushed for his first statue project. "I was like, "Where does this come from? How did this get done?"

He said he had a vision to bring the Apollo 11 statue to the Space Coast ahead of the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. Its installation at KSC in 2019 was followed by the Apollo 13 statue in Houston in 2021.

"This is year seven doing this. And I'm it. I'm out visioning the projects, getting the astronauts to give me the rights, finding the location, finding the money, and getting it built," he said. "It's really just about heart, and that's the hardest thing about this job is finding like-minded people with heart."

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