

NASA program gives students access to astronauts

August 8 2017, by Danny Baird



A Girl Scout raises a ham radio antenna to the sky in preparation for the ARISS contact. Credit: Girl Scouts of North East Ohio

On June 23, NASA astronaut Jack Fischer spoke with 22 Girl Scouts of North East Ohio, while he was aboard the International Space Station.

More than 400 people attended the event, with many more watching live footage online.

Children all over the world can connect with astronauts aboard the [space station](#) via Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS), and with the help of volunteer ham operators. ARISS delegates from the United States, Russia, Canada, Europe and Japan help connect the world, from Senegal to Cincinnati, with the station. These contacts endeavor to inspire youth worldwide to pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) interests and careers.

"Ham radio was one of the most rewarding things to do on the International Space Station," said NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, a former Girl Scout and Ohioan. "Having that connection with kids on Earth who have worked hard to understand and build HAM radio was priceless. Their excited voices, echoing through equipment they had a hand in building, brought numerous smiles and often tears to my eyes. Afterward, getting the reports on how the kids enjoyed the event, and how amazed that they were that they were talking directly with a space ship, really made me understand how important and how easily we can get kids interested in STEM. ARISS is a great project and we are so happy to be part of it on the International Space Station."

The Girl Scout mission is to build [girls](#) of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. Williams embodies this tenet. She's lived more than 322 days in space over the course of four expeditions to the ISS, Expeditions 14, 15, 32 and 33. During her stay, she logged more than 50 hours of space walks, ran the first marathon and triathlon in space, and participated in a number of ARISS contacts. She currently trains to fly America's first commercially built spacecraft, the Boeing CST-100 Starliner and the SpaceX Dragon.



Patches Girl Scouts received upon completion of the ARISS contact. Credit: Girl Scouts of North East Ohio

The week prior to the contact, Sydney Walter, an 11-year-old Girl Scout, participated in the Girl Scouts of North East Ohio's Space Cadettes program at Camp Timberlane in Lorain County, Ohio. She met with NASA professionals, learned what it's like to float in zero gravity and explored constellations with a Starlab portable planetarium. The ARISS

contact rounded off a week of activities devoted to STEM education.

"I really like that NASA can do this for kids at schools and Girl Scouts at camp," said Sydney. "It was a really fun experience and I will never forget it."

Programs like this instill powerful memories that can spark a lifelong passion for STEM. For 10 minutes, with the space station in range of northern Ohio, a field of girls spoke with humans among the stars. Their vests now bear patches honoring that moment in time. Pink and green encircle a yellow tent with the bold gray shadow of the space [station](#) above. The patches honor 10 minutes when they were not Girl Scouts—they were astronauts.

Volunteers from national amateur radio organizations and AMSAT run ARISS events. For more information and to learn how your community can get involved, visit <http://www.ariss.org>.

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

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