

## Houston BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## COMMENTARY

# Space Center Houston: Focus on future instead of past

By Jeff Krukin

Special to Houston Business Journal

Why is Space Center Houston facing financial upheaval? Why did the projected visitation of two million people per year instead reach only 750,000? Are ticket prices too high? Are the exhibits too limited and unexciting? Is the parking lot too small? The answers to the last three questions: Yes, perhaps and no.

Let's consider the answer to the first two questions. Space Center Houston is a pyramid, an edifice to honor the past with little relevance for the future. Oh sure, you can learn about the space station. As if the space station is the only future we can hope to achieve in space.

I suggest that attendance is low because people are bored, disinterested and unsatisfied with the center for the same reasons they feel the same way about our space program. Reliving the great accomplishments of the past does nothing to satiate our hunger for the future.

Watching films about Apollo missions and the space shuttle

does not teach us how a permanent human presence in space is vital to our future on Earth. Therefore, the center misses its real potential to be a learning experience and succumbs to the status of a low-grade amusement park.

Forget the space station. A small number of astronauts in orbit is not going to open the



frontier for the rest of us. NASA is not going to open the frontier for the rest of us.

Explore it with un-manned probes, yes. Pave the way for people to live, work and play in low-Earth orbit and on the Moon, no. Only one power will accomplish this, the power of free enterprise. The reason is simple. Humans will transform space for the same reason we have transformed every part of our world — it is in our own self-interest to improve our lives.

This world needs resources at an ever-increasing rate. Allow people to earn a living by obtaining those resources

in space, and we will accomplish something that does not currently exist — cheap access to space. It all starts with that.

NASA promised to give us such access with the shuttle. NASA failed. "Cheap access to space," or CATS. Remember that phrase? If we have CATS, we get hotels in orbit and weekend trips. We get orbiting manufacturing facilities and solar power satellite systems. We get back to the moon and we stay. We move up and

out. Not for political Cold War reasons, but for the resources to sustain our standard of living.

Space Center Houston needs to reinvent itself, the same way our nation must reinvent its space activities.

Don't bore me with the history I've seen so many times before. Excite me with the potential of our future. Tell me about Kistler Aerospace. Tell me about Advent Launch Services and General Space Corp., both in Houston. Tell me about LunaCorp. Tell me about the entrepreneurs, in Texas and elsewhere, who are

struggling to define our future in space. Tell me about "Space Tourism: The Perspective from Japan and Some Implications for the United States" published in *The Journal of Practical Applications in Space*. There is so much that we are not being told.

Space Center Houston must step away from the shadow of Johnson Space Center. Today, it is nothing more than a publicity stunt for the status quo. There is great potential in what it can become, great opportunity in what we may learn there. This is its challenge, its path to relevance and survival. ■

*Jeff Krukin is a director of the Space Frontier Foundation, an organization seeking to expand commercial endeavors in space.*

Houston Business Journal welcomes contributions to the Commentary section. Submissions should be no more than 1,000 words in length and will be edited for style.