

Shuttle astronaut urges students to use their talent, work hard

By RAE BEASLEY
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"We are just regular folks who worked real hard," Major Andrew Allen, an astronaut with the NASA space program told Freedom High students Monday. "With a little luck and talent, you can make it work, you can do great things."

Allen spoke to students at Freedom and East Burke high schools and Western Piedmont Community College encouraging them to go out and be their best.

"Everyone has some kind of talent," he said. "With a little luck and a lot of hard work, you can do anything."

Allen, 36, also spoke on the life of an astronaut and the long hours of training they undergo in preparation for a launch.

"When we are training for a mission, we are placed in what we call a vomit comet," he said. "It's like a roller coaster ride. We spend about two seconds with zero gravity and about two seconds with about two times the

force of gravity. In space suits that weigh about 300 pounds that can be a rough ride for some."

After the crew is launched into space, they spend 16 hours a day doing the "homework" NASA assigns them, Allen said. The rest of the time is spent sleeping and playing with the toys and things they are allowed to bring with them on the trip.

"We make movies of what we do," he said. "We only sleep about three or four hours a night. We are each allowed to bring a walkman and six cassettes, sometimes we just look outside and listen to our tapes. We also take lots of pictures."

The space shuttle orbits the earth every 90 minutes, Allen said. "We see a sunset or sunrise every 90 minutes."

Space in the shuttle is also limited, he said. The crew often uses the ceilings or walls to do experiments, by attaching themselves to the walls with velcro. This gives the crew the extra



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room needed to eat or do experiments, Allen said.

"We could not survive without velcro," he said.

While sleeping, the crew must velcro their arms, legs and head into the bed so they can rest. If the arms or head are not tied down, they will float, Allen said.

Allen also told students interesting facts about what it was like to eat in space. When the astronauts drink juice, or when they release it from a container it looks like a large bubble, he said.

After the crew has completed

their mission, they head home.

"We try to make a nice landing, so we don't embarrass ourselves on CNN or who ever is covering the landing," he said.

It takes a couple of hours for the astronauts's bodies to re-adjust after they land.

"When we are in space, we don't use our leg muscles or heart muscles very much," he said. "So when we land our bodies must re-adjust to gravity."

Exersize is also very important to astronauts when they are in space.

When asked if the "Teacher in Space" program that was started and ended in tragedy, killing tea-

cher Christa McAuliffe and several astronauts several years ago would continue, Allen said he hoped that it would. He also said he would like to see others, such as journalists, take flight, because they are better at articulating their feelings about what they see, he said.

Allen also spoke of the dangers involved in being a crew member on a space shuttle.

Colliding with objects bigger than a piece of my hand can be very dangerous, he said.

"A paint chip can break out a window in space," he said. "Everything that is bigger than a piece of my hand is tracked by

radar."

When the shuttle is launched, the crew holds its breath for about two minutes until the spacecraft is safely in space, he said.

"Scientists say that most people can't hold their breath for two minutes, I guarantee they can and do," he said.

Allen also spoke on what astronauts hoped to accomplish in the space program in the future.

"We hope to have a space station that we can live in for an extended period of time," he said. "Some may live for months, others may live for a year. We want to experiment with mixing

different substances that you can't mix on Earth. For example, metals or certain medicines. We would also like to make a colony on the moon."

It takes about four or five years of extensive training before you are ready to fly a space shuttle, he said.

"But once you finish training, you are prepared for everything that happens to you," he said. "The only thing I lack is what I will see with my very own eyes."

Allen has logged more than 3,000 flight hours and has flown more than 30 different aircraft. He is assigned as a pilot on a flight of the space shuttle sched-

uled for the summer of 1992.

He graduated from the Marines Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course and the Naval Fighter Weapons School, also known as Top Gun.

Also a graduate of the U.S. Navy Test Pilot School in Maryland, he was a test pilot under instruction when advised of his selection in the astronaut program.

"This has been a great opportunity for our student body to share first hand experiences and gain knowledge about the space program," Principal Jim Draughn said. "Major Allen is a very positive role model for our students."