

'IOWA WAS WHERE SPACE RESEARCH WAS BORN'

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For far too many people, Iowa's main claim to space fame is as the fictional future birthplace of "Star Trek's" Capt. James T. Kirk. But the Hawkeye state also has a long history in the real-life exploration of the final frontier.

University of Iowa faculty members, graduate students and alumni have played a role in more than 100 spacecraft over the past six decades — the first predating the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 1958.

From the pre-NASA pioneering work of the late UI James Van Allen, to the historic Pioneer 10/11 and Voyager I/II spacecraft, to more recent probes around Mars, Jupiter, and Pluto, experts from the Iowa City area have played a key role in helping expand humanity's horizon of knowledge.

When it comes to space research, in fact, it's hard to find another public university that can match the history of the University of Iowa.

"Iowa was where space research was born," Don Gurnett, UI professor of physics and astronomy, told the Press-Citizen back in 2005. "It really put Iowa on the map, and Iowa still is a leader in space research."

The résumé for Van Allen, Gurnett's mentor, reads like a history of the American space program.

He headed up the team that built instruments for countless satellites, including Explorer I, the first American satellite launched in February 1958 and for deep space explorers, such as Pioneers 10 and 11.

The work with the Explorer program led to his discovery of the two belts of ionized gas that encircle the earth — which were later christened the "Van Allen Belts" in his honor.

Van Allen's influence went beyond the lab, as well. He also was a popular teacher at the University of Iowa.

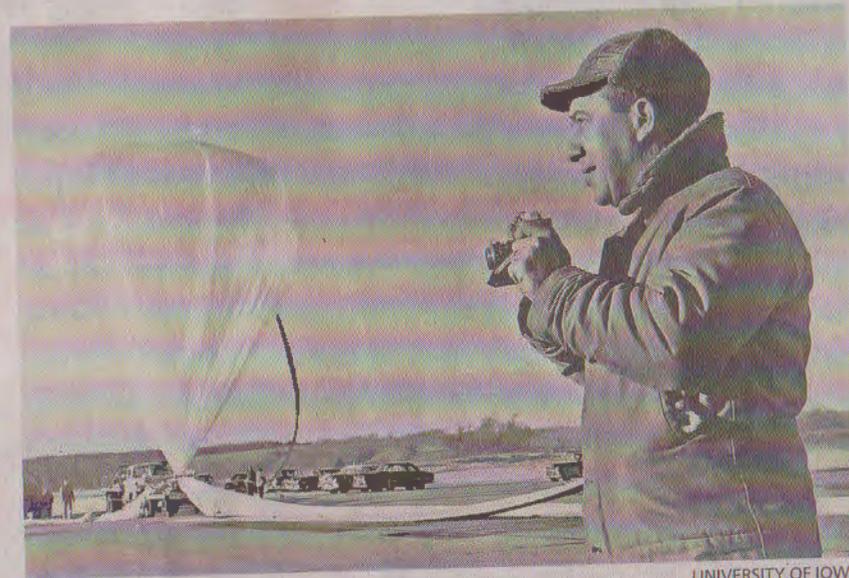
A list of his graduate and undergraduate students is like a "who's who" among space researchers. Gurnett, Lou Frank, George Ludwig and Leslie Meredith are just a few of those former students.

"These contributions were not just from one person working alone in a white lab coat," said Cornelia Lang, an associate professor in the UI Department of Physics and Astronomy. "They were made by whole teams of people working together."

Van Allen died in 2006, but UI-created instruments and equipment continue to provide NASA scientists with data from Voyager, the Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution spacecraft (MAVEN), Juno and the Van Allen Probes.

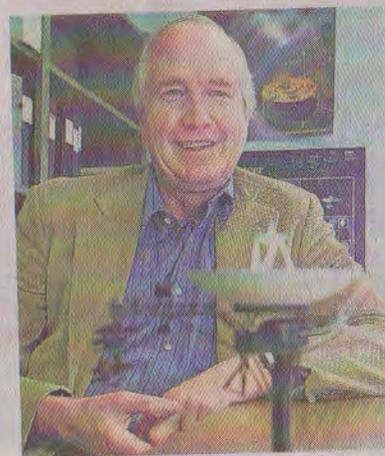
And in the lower levels of what is now Van Allen Hall on the UI campus prove the shops and laboratories for developing new rockets and instruments that are designed with an "out of this world" purpose in mind.

"This research didn't stop with Van Allen," Lang said. "This remains an active, vibrant field. There is a whole new generation of people carrying on this legacy."



UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

James Van Allen is seen at the Iowa City airport, circa 1951, conducting tests of high-altitude weather balloons and research equipment and telemetry. Peter Van Allen Iowa City Airport, 1951



PRESS-CITIZEN FILE PHOTO

In this file photo from 1999, Donald Gurnett sets in his office in Van Allen Hall.



UNIVERSITY OF IOWA SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

This photo shows the University of Iowa homecoming corn sculpture in 1958. It depicts Herky the Hawk on a rocket and celebrates the role UI faculty and graduate students played in that year's successful launch of Explorer I.