

Spaceport America launches free virtual field trips for NM classrooms

LAS CRUCES - Spaceport America on Tuesday announced a nationwide partnership with [FieldTripZoom](#), a web-based provider of live and interactive virtual field trips. The partnership will allow students across the United States to experience the world's first purpose-built commercial spaceport. Spaceport America's deal will allow teachers across the state to provide a range of STEM and other educational content free to every K-12 classroom across the state.

The subscription-based site provides more than 165 virtual field trips — including the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Alaska SeaLife Center and the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. For the remainder of the 2016-17 school year, classrooms across New Mexico can access any of the virtual field trips for free.

The Spaceport America field trips will continue to be offered free to all New Mexico schools for the foreseeable future, according to Tammara Anderton, the spaceport's director of marketing.

“We wanted to make Spaceport America accessible to all kids in New Mexico, because their parents paid for it,” Anderton told the Sun-News. “And we’ve already seen that, for many of the state’s more remote schools that are cash-strapped, it’s nearly impossible for them to take a field trip to see the spaceport.”

Spaceport America, in southern Sierra County, north of Las Cruces, was built at a taxpayer-funded expense of roughly \$218.5 million.

Anderton said the spaceport plans to provide a variety of virtual field trips, describing them as “building blocks.” The early field trips will explain the spaceport, its purpose and its role in “democratizing space” through commercial space flight, Anderton explained. Students will get a behind-the-scenes look at spaceport operations.

“We’ll help them to understand what it takes to run a spaceport. It’s not just rocket scientists,” she said.

On May 5, classrooms from across the state and nation can join the Spaceport America crew for a vertical rocket launch, in honor of Space Week. Later this year, the spaceport hopes to offer a Virgin Galactic launch, which is horizontal.

Jo Galván, spokeswoman for Las Cruces Public Schools, said the free, virtual field trips will help offset some of the district’s budget shortfalls this year.

“This will really help supplement the educational opportunities we’re able to provide students this year,” Galván said. “We’re in a spending freeze. And student instruction — which includes field trips — would be among the last places we would try to cut. But, when every expense is being closely scrutinized, this is a great tool and opportunity to allow kids to see something they might not otherwise be able to experience.”

[Daniel Hicks](#), chief executive officer of Spaceport America, said he hopes the partnership makes Spaceport America more accessible to students.

“We want every young New Mexican to have the opportunity to ‘visit’ Spaceport America, either physically or virtually and leave inspired because it is a national treasure playing a historic role in the future of space travel, exploration and commercialization,” Hicks said.

“I spent last week in D.C. with the Commercial Spaceflight Federation,” Hicks told the Sun-News Monday. “What’s so exciting about the timing of this partnership is that we are really on the cusp of some major breakthroughs in commercial spaceflight, and we’re going to be able to take some of these historic events and bring them to our students across the state.”

Hicks compared this moment in commercial spaceflight to NASA’s Apollo programs of the 1960s.

The Spaceport America virtual field trips also “tie in nicely” with the district’s [Challenger Learning Center](#) which opened in 2015, Galván said. Every sixth-grade class visits the Challenger Learning Center twice per year for [an immersive, space-flight simulation](#).

The first virtual field trip will take place on Feb. 28, and then at least once per month for the rest of the school year.

"We are excited to bring awe-inspiring content from the iconic Spaceport America in New Mexico to students throughout the world as well as hosting special programs for New Mexico K-12 public and private school students," said Doug Ashton, co-founder of FieldTripZoom. "And we are grateful to Spaceport America for sponsoring access to all our content partner programs for these same students for the remainder of this school year."

New Mexico educators can book access to live streaming of content across a wide range of subjects and sign up for a free season pass by registering at [fieldtripzoom.com](#).

“They really found a unique way to bring this experience to students across the state, so kudos to them,” Galván said.

“We just want it to be fun and inspiring. This is a historic place and time for

commercial space flight,” Anderton said.

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