



May 31, 2009

## Sky's the limit for space tourism

### Summit reveals many possibilities

*BY PATRICK PETERSON  
FLORIDA TODAY*

The future of the space tourism industry could lie in places like Titusville, where an imaginative project will never launch a rocket.

The 4 Frontiers Corporation has picked a site, won tax abatements and forged a business plan, but it needs at least \$250,000 in seed money to begin a project that would feature a replica of a realistic Mars habitat, a technology center and a pavilion to showcase the latest space gear.

It's a dream inspired by the likes of British music mogul Sir Richard Branson, who has found scores of customers willing to invest roughly \$200,000 for a ride to sub-orbital space on SpaceShipTwo.

Inspiration for the local space venture also comes from Arizona-based RocketShip Tours, which is selling rides for \$95,000 aboard a single passenger plane under construction by California-based XCOR Aerospace.

"These firms are very entrepreneurial. The public is excited by this," Joseph Palaia, vice president of operations and research and development for 4 Frontiers Corporation, said Wednesday at a commercial space summit in Orlando.

"This is a new barnstorming, if you will," Palaia said.

These efforts are not the only ones tackling the intersection of space travel and commerce. A host of space entertainment companies have emerged to capitalize on the urge to experience space travel less expensively -- on Earth.

A leading theme at the summit, organized by Boeing Co., was space travel as entertainment. The concept is a familiar one to Walt Disney Co., whose theme parks feature the thrill ride Space Mountain, a space-themed roller coaster, and Mission Space, which mimics a trip to Mars in 5.5 minutes.

"I expect that we will be going to space soon," Luc Mayrand, senior show producer for Walt Disney Imagineering, said. "Staying in a hotel in space, that's going to happen eventually."

While NASA's trips to space are about science, safety and exploration, Disney and other entrepreneurial companies can be expected to focus on fun when they begin space travel.

"We want our guests to have an emotional experience," Mayrand said. "It's really about the joy of going to space. It only fits the context of entertainment if they have a great time."

Raised on movies such as "Star Wars" and "Star Trek," space tourists will have high expectations for space travel, which astronauts have described as hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror.

Space travel companies of the future will be required to incorporate entertainment as they attempt to craft an unforgettable experience.

"They have an expectation that isn't based in reality," Steven Blum, senior vice president of engineering at Universal Creative, said of would-be space tourists. "They expect a lot more than reality because they have been trained by companies like mine in Hollywood."

The number of space travel entrepreneurs is growing, and one of the most charismatic is a Danish financier who often appears in a black jumpsuit, as if ready for blast-off.

Per Wimmer, a global financier, adventurer and philanthropist, specializes in oil and gas, energy and mining investments. But he's used his fundraising talent to organize and participate in charity stunts like the first tandem skydive over Mt. Everest. And he aims to help finance a company that can put him in orbit.

The goals of his company, Wimmer Space, are simply stated: "To get Per Wimmer through extreme adventures, including to space and back safely and, ultimately, to place the Danish flag, the 'Dannebrog,' on the Moon and in the process to inspire today's children to live out their dreams."

Wimmer's already bought the first \$95,000 ticket on XCOR's rocketplane, due to be tested next year, and with his charity work and his financial connections, he might easily be labeled the prototypical barnstorming space adventurer.

"Bankers are typically boring and conservative," he said. "I follow my dreams every single day in finance or in space and adventures."

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