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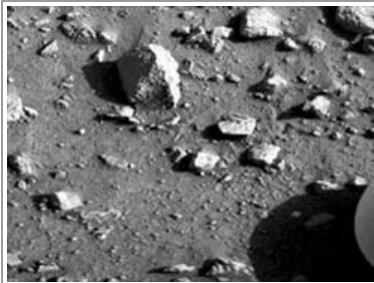


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Local company planning space-based theme park



Reported by: Jeff Butera
Email: jbutera@wfts.com
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First picture from Mars

TAMPA, FL -- Joe Palaia dreams big.

"I want to be part of opening up the future," Palaia said. "My dream is to settle the Red Planet in my lifetime."

Palaia is an engineer with a degree from Harvard. But instead of working with a private company after school, he joined other engineers in their own.

The company is called 4Frontiers and is based in New Port Richey. The company's goal is simple: to one day settle Mars.

When Palaia talks about the endeavor, he describes cities and neighborhoods on Mars, comparing it to the settlement of the West.

"You're going to see the development of mining towns, other outposts, the development of trade, people going back and forth and people settling there," Palaia said.

At Kennedy Space Center in April, President Barack Obama outlined his plans for space exploration. The president suggested the country could send a human to Mars and return them to Earth by the mid-2030's. He also made it clear private companies would play a significant role in space development.

Palaia was encouraged to hear both things. He agrees the country can reach Mars during his lifetime and believes settlement is also a realistic goal.

"Yes, we can do this," Palaia said. "There's no technological breakthrough required, no science fiction, just a lot of good engineering that needs to be done."

Not everyone agrees, though, that colonization of Mars is possible. More research remains about how to deal with things on the planet like atmospheric problems and temperature issues.

Plus, 4Frontiers needs money to support the research they need to jump the remaining hurdles standing in the way of Mars colonization.

To get that money, 4Frontiers plans to open a space-based theme park in Titusville called 'Inter-Space.' They will break ground on the theme park later this year and hope to open in 2012.

The park will allow guests to simulate life on Mars.

"We want to create an environment as real and hands-on as possible," Palaia said. "It's interactive. It's in your gut. It's a role-playing experience."

According to Palaia, "day visitors" can come for a single day, which will cost between \$100 and \$200. "Week-long settlers" will pay between \$500 and \$1,000 a day to experience everything a Mars settlement would include.

When asked if his theme-park can actually compete with NASA, Palaia said yes. He reasoned that, as an attraction, NASA focuses on the past and their history, whereas his theme park will look to the future and what humans can do.

And he believes what he can do, is one day settle Mars.

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