

SIERRA COUNTY SENTINEL

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Sierra County: Gateway Into Space



(SENTINEL Photo/Chuck Wentworth)

VIEWING FLIGHT - Sierra County residents gathered at the T-or-C Civic Center Sunday, July 11 to view a live-stream broadcast of Virgin Galactic's Unity-22 mission. The experience was thrilling even from a terrestrial perspective and Virgin Galactic's success truly opened the door to future space tourism. The morning's watch party was organized by representatives from all of Sierra County's municipalities to provide local citizens with an opportunity to share in the history-making flight. Local voters supported the construction of Spaceport America in Sierra County in 2008, and have since been patiently watching the facility grow. Sunday's successful flight by Virgin Galactic is seen as a major step toward more regular commercial spaceflights and as a new phase of operational development for Spaceport America.

Community Gathers To Witness History

By Chuck Wentworth
SENTINEL

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With cooperation from all of Sierra County's municipalities, a special Watch Party was organized to allow citizens an opportunity to view the historic flight of Virgin Galactic's VSS Unity-22 Sunday morning, July 11. The history making event encouraged more than a hundred area residents and/or visitors to rise early and to make their way to the Truth or Consequences Civic Center for an anticipated 7 am take-

off. While some chose to depart when the flight was initially delayed for 90 minutes, others arrived later, and near the same size crowd of interested and curious guests were on hand throughout the morning to share in the thrilling experience.

Although the world's first fully manned commercial spaceflight emanated from Sierra County's Spaceport America, on-site attendance was restricted. This situation left most community residents with no choice but to follow the event through available television and internet broadcasts, alongside the rest of the world. (Fortunately, Sentinel reporter Jim Shiley was able to

personally attend the historic event at Spaceport America. See his full report and personal observations in this issue for a special inside view of Sunday's milestone setting mission.)

Sierra County's watch party hosts not only assured plentiful room and seating, and a very large projection screen, but also provided free burritos and other provisions to fortify all those who turned out to share in Sunday's viewing. This always welcomed offering proved to be especially helpful during the unexpected flight delay, fueling a lively social hour (and a half), as Virgin Galactic's team assured all would be in

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(SENTINEL Photos/Jim Shiley)

"CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE" - Surrounded by children Sir Richard Branson, Virgin Galactic founder and now its "Astronaut Number 1", departs for the VMS Unity spacecraft at the outset of the Unity 22 Mission, July 11. Branson has consistently tried to ensure children be included, not only in the day's historic events, but in many of the activities of Virgin Galactic.

Live From Spaceport America

By Jim Shiley
SENTINEL

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Sierra County was at the forefront of history Sunday morning, July 11 when Virgin Galactic sent SpaceShip Two, VSS Unity into space carrying two pilots and four mission specialists in the first commercial space venture. It launched from Spaceport America, located 20 miles outside of Truth or Consequences on the northern edge of the White Sands Missile Range.

As guests and media from around the world gathered at the facility, the entire flight team, pilots and crew, along with technicians and ground support worked feverishly, finalizing preparations for the launch. Overnight weather delayed rolling out the spacecraft by 90 minutes. Originally set for 7 a.m. (MST), it was delayed until 8:30 a.m.

The space vehicle, Virgin Galactic's SpaceShip Two, VSS Unity is held slung between the two fuselages of a purpose-built carrier aircraft, dubbed VMS Eve, named after Virgin Galactic founder and guiding force, Sir Richard Branson's mother. The carrier aircraft carries Unity to an altitude of nearly 50,000 feet where it is disengaged from the carrier craft and its own rocket engine take over, carrying it upward to its target altitude of 53 miles above Earth. The flight was the 22nd for the Unity craft, its fourth trip into space, the others being lower altitude test flights.

While Unity is designed to carry eight people, two pilots and six passengers, there were six aboard for Sunday's launch. The four mission specialists were: Sirisha Bandla, Virgin Galactic's Vice President of Government Affairs and Research Operations. Her task was to evaluate conduct of research. This involved an experiment from the University of Florida requiring handheld fixation tubes, activated at various points in the flight.

(*LIVE* Continued On Page A3)

T-OR-C COMMISSION RETURNS TO EARTHLY MATTERS:

Electric Opt-Out Fee Upheld

By Chuck Wentworth
SENTINEL

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Prior to the start (and again at the conclusion) of the Truth or Consequences City Commission's July 14 regular meeting, mayor Sandra Whitehead and commissioners took the opportunity to replay a video of Virgin Galactic's successful Unity-22 mission realized at Sierra County's Spaceport America July 11. Later in the meeting, during board reports, city manager Bruce Swingle, the mayor and fellow commissioners all joined in congratulating Virgin Galactic's team on achieving the long held goal of commercial spaceflight. Board members also expressed sincere appreciation for everyone involved with staging the community's Sunday morning watch party at the civic center.

Commissioner comments further acknowledged the unprecedented worldwide attention that was focused on Sierra County and T-or-C throughout the live broadcast, and members agreed the milestone crossed by Virgin Galactic's team truly opened the door to a new future of opportunity.

While obviously pleased with this important step forward for Spaceport America and the community, commissioners nonetheless returned their focus to the morning's regular meeting agenda and moved on to address a series of more pressing terrestrial matters.

OPT-OUT FEE UPHeld

After receiving several public comments, which questioned use of the term "digital" and other aspects of proposed Resolution No. 05 21/22, commissioners ultimately rendered a three-to-one majority vote in favor of retaining an established \$50 monthly meter reading fee for residents

choosing to opt out of inclusion in the electric department's Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

In discussion of the matter, commissioners determined use of the term "digital" was appropriate. Questions about this concern revealed all meters within the city's electric system are now digital, and are only differentiated as either being connected to the AMI system or not.

In response to a question by mayor pro-tem Amanda Forrister, board members learned a number of older analog meters were

recently replaced with AMI digital meters. While this point was acknowledged, further questioning confirmed the city is not retaining the outdated meters, having opted to move forward solely with digital AMI, or digital mechanical meters.

Utility office manager Sonya Williams reemphasized difficulties surrounding past efforts to manually obtain meter readings for the board. In this regard and in respect of the city's investment in converting to the AMI system, she also questioned how far into the future city leaders would

want to continue incurring expenses for the purchase of non-AMI digital meters.

Following comments from the board and staff members, mayor Whitehead said she felt the due diligence required for this decision was sufficient. She pointed out how the commission had convened numerous public meetings regarding the proposed opt-out meter reading fee and said she felt the proposed \$50 per month amount was fair.

With the mayor pro-tem subsequently entering a motion to

(*CITY* Continued On Page C4)



(SENTINEL Photos/Chuck Wentworth)

BROADBAND - Representatives from Windstream/Kinetic offered T-or-C commissioners a presentation about the firm's current services and future developments July 14. Representative Johnny Montoya, at podium, began the presentation by briefly outlining the firm's history of meeting rural telecommunications needs and pointing to ongoing efforts being extended through New Mexico and 17 other states. Board members also heard from representatives Johnny Etheridge and Dan Ferguson, who further detailed the firm's present project to install broadband capabilities throughout many areas of T-or-C. They also affirmed Windstream/Kinetic's eagerness to establish partnerships with communities to best incorporate recent steps by state lawmakers to improve connectivity throughout New Mexico.

Weather
Sierra County
Lake Levels
Lake Elevation
(7-16-21):
4,303.84 ft.
(1 Year ago):
4,317.58 ft.

SOURCE: National Weather Service

	HIGH	LOW
July 9	98	73
July 10	99	72
July 11	94	70
July 12	90	70
July 13	90	70
July 14	91	70
July 15	91	71

Extended Forecast

- Friday, July 16**
Partly Cloudy - high 93, low 72
- Saturday, July 17**
Partly Cloudy - high 93, low 71
- Sunday, July 18**
Partly Cloudy - high 92, low 72
- Monday, July 19**
Partly Cloudy - high 92, low 71
- Tuesday, July 20**
Partly Cloudy - high 90, low 68
- Wednesday, July 21**
Partly Cloudy - high 85, low 67
- Thursday, July 22**
Mostly Sunny - high 88, low 68
- Friday, July 23**
Partly Cloudy - high 90, low 69

QUIET MOMENTS

Lord, Thank you for seeing the best in us, when everyone else only sees the worst. Thank you for loving us when we don't love ourselves. Help us to love the person You created us to be, not who others want to see. We are one of a kind, designed to glorify You as only we can! We know you created something beautiful when you created us. Help us to remember we are a masterpiece and to love ourselves. Amen



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