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## Then and Now: NASA Stennis Continues Frontline Support of Space Exploration

By John Bailey, Director, NASA's Stennis Space Center

“Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.” Those few words, spoken by NASA astronaut Neil Armstrong almost 240,000 miles from Earth, announced the successful landing of the Apollo 11 lunar module on the surface of the Moon on July 20, 1969.

Hours later, the world watched – and the spirit of this nation soared – as Armstrong and fellow astronaut Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to step foot on another world. The two astronauts explored around the lunar landing site for more than two hours, collecting soil and rock samples, setting up experiments, and planting an American flag.

Millions of people of all ages, from all nations and backgrounds, united in celebrating completion of this great quest of exploration. Though it may not have been known to many at the time, few were more invested in the success of Apollo 11 than the men and women working at what is today NASA's Stennis Space Center.

The goal of stepping foot on the Moon established our south Mississippi NASA center at the front end of the critical path for space exploration. Before any astronaut flew to the Moon, the rocket stages and engines to carry them were fired on the towering test stands at NASA Stennis.

The night Americans rejoiced in being the first nation to send humans to the Moon began much earlier with hot fire testing in Mississippi, including the Saturn V first and second stages that launched and powered Apollo 11.

The NASA Stennis team of the 1960s carried the lives of the astronauts in their hands. Every crewed Apollo mission flew with stages and engines tested and proven flight-worthy in Mississippi.

Apollo 11, the first of six missions that landed humans on the Moon, particularly inspired future generations. It laid the groundwork for where we are today.

NASA is returning to the Moon with the Artemis campaign, collaborating with commercial and international partners to establish the first long-term presence on the Moon. We will explore more of the lunar surface than ever as we prepare for future missions to Mars.

As NASA maintains American leadership in space exploration, we are going back to the Moon for scientific discovery, economic benefits, and inspiration of a new generation of explorers: the Artemis Generation.

Just as NASA Stennis tested rocket stages and engines for Apollo, we are doing the same to power Artemis missions to the Moon. What began 55 years ago continues – and NASA Stennis remains on the front line of powering our nation's space dreams.

In 1969, all of Mississippi was a part of the historical moment of Apollo 11 through the work at NASA Stennis. Today, thanks to the work of a dedicated NASA Stennis team, all of Mississippi shares in our return to the Moon with Artemis.

Together, we can be proud of this state's contributions to NASA's great mission. Together, we explore the secrets of the universe for the benefit of all.

The secret of NASA Stennis is out – the next great era of human space exploration goes through Mississippi. Together – we are all part of it.