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INTERACTIVE WEBSITE BRINGS SHUTTLE MISSION CLOSER TO HOME

Wouldn't it be great to be in 10 places at once? That's what NASA's Educator Astronaut Joe Acaba will be doing later this week – virtually, at least.

NASA's Digital Learning Network and NASA's Explorer School program are teaming up to host the STS-118 Relay Rally, a virtual tour of NASA's ten field centers. Each day, several NASA centers, along with an Explorer School from each of their regions, will interact with Acaba, questioning him about astronaut training and shuttle missions.

Lake View Elementary School in Huntington Beach, a NASA Explorer School partnering with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif., will be featured on April 20. JPL engineer Brett Kennedy will also talk about a robot that may one day travel into space with astronauts. LEMUR, short for Limbed Excursion Mechanical Utility Robot, has six limbs and can operate upside down.

Each of NASA's 10 centers contributes different skills to every space shuttle mission. The STS-118 Relay Rally will give participants and viewers a better idea of this teamwork. Even though only the school participants will be able to ask questions each day, the event will be webcast live, so students across the nation will be able to watch and learn.

The STS-118 flight of the Space Shuttle Endeavour will be the first flight of Educator Astronaut Barbara Morgan and an important step in the ongoing assembly of the International Space Station. Other STS-118 crewmembers are Commander Scott Kelly, Pilot Charles Hobaugh and Mission Specialists Tracy Caldwell, Rick Mastracchio and Dave Williams.

The other NASA centers participating in the event will be Stennis Space Center near Bay St. Louis, Miss.; Dryden Flight Research Center in Edwards, Calif.; Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, Calif.; and Johnson Space Center in Houston.

Educator Astronauts are classroom teachers who have completed training to become mission specialist astronauts. Currently, there are four Educator Astronauts. After

teaching math and science in a high school for one year and middle school for four years, Acaba was selected an Educator Astronaut in May 2004. In February 2006, he completed astronaut candidate training that included scientific and technical briefings, intensive instruction in shuttle and International Space Station systems, T-38 flight training and water and wilderness survival training. Acaba is assigned to the hardware integration team in the space station branch working technical issues with European Space Agency hardware. He will serve in technical assignments until assigned to a space flight.

Through the NASA Explorer Schools program, NASA enters partnerships with selected schools to bring engaging science, technology, engineering and mathematics lessons to educators, students and families. A competitive application process and selection of new school teams occur each spring. With this project, NASA continues its tradition of investing in the nation's educational systems. The Explorer School program is directly tied to the agency's major education goal of attracting and retaining students in science, technology, engineering and math disciplines.

For more information on the STS-118 Relay Rally or to watch this live webcast, visit:
<http://nasadln.nmsu.edu/dln/content/catalog/details/?cid=568>

For more information on research at NASA, visit:
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