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Dr. Edward Cheung Reports Everything is A-Ok and Ready for Launch for STS-135

[General News](#)

 June 28th, 2011

No comments ([RSS 2.0](#))



Aruban-born electrical engineer Dr. Edward Cheung, a specialist in robotics, has been with NASA for 20 years, a large portion of on the service team of the Hubble Space Telescope, and finally, as Principal Engineer. He has been sharing his insider's point of view with THE MORNING NEWS and islanders for a number of years, allowing his compatriots and island visitors to share the wonder and excitement first-hand of the final mission to the HST in 2009, which can still be read on Aruba's official website, www.aruba.com.

In two weeks, Dr. Cheung will again participate in the last manned U.S. mission to the International Space Station, (ISS,) after which the last of the three orbiters, Space Shuttle Atlantis, will be retired and take a place in the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex in Florida. THE MORNING NEWS will again be publishing his eyewitness, behind-the-scenes accounts of this historic event.

Dr. Cheung just spent two days at Kennedy seeing that new equipment from his department is safely installed on the shuttle and all systems are a go. Since there will be no more missions to the HST, Ed and his team have redirected their skills towards a new project, and he now holds the title of Robotic Refueling Mission Electrical Lead, Jackson & Tull/NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, which is in Maryland.

The team has devised robotics that will allow satellites to be refueled in space, thus extending their life and providing huge savings by no longer needing to replace weather and communication satellites in orbit every few years. "At present, there is at least one satellite launching a month in the U.S. alone; private or governmental. If the technology on a particular satellite doesn't need to be updated, this could be a viable alternative" he explains.



During preparations for the upcoming launch, Dr. Cheung had the opportunity to meet the astronauts of STS-135: Commander Chris Ferguson, Pilot Doug Hurley and Mission Specialists Rex Walheim and Sandy Magnus. This is the smallest crew a shuttle has carried since April 4, 1983 on the Challenger.

He reports “The crew feels a heavy responsibility – not just for this mission, but all past ones,” as surely, despite numerous missions of the 30 year program, it is the successful completion of this final and hopefully triumphant return which will likely be most remembered. Endeavor, the newest of the 3 shuttles, returned on June 1 to be retired to the California Space Center. Discovery, which logged the most space miles, completed its last mission successfully on March 9, to finally take its place at National Air and Space Museum in The Smithsonian, Washington, D.C, and Enterprise, which was in store, will go to the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City. The STS-135 crew members were custom-fitted for a Russian Sokol space suit and molded Soyuz seat liner, should they be forced to return to Earth via a Soyuz capsule, if it is decided the Atlantis is unable to make a safe re-entry as there is no “back-up” shuttle at this point. If so, the crew members will reside in the ISS for up to a year as they are returned to earth one by one.

Thursday was a practice launch day for engineers and crew; Dr. Cheung managed to capture a moment while the shuttle waits on the launch pad to display the flag of his homeland next to the airlock that docks with the ISS. He reports a hydrogen fuel valve in one of the shuttle’s three main engines appeared to leak during an external tank fueling test. However, it was replaced along with some parallel work to X-ray structural stiffeners in the tank’s central compartment; this is not expected to impact the target launch date of July 8. Atlantis is packed with a year’s worth of supplies for the ISS; all subsequent launches will be from other nations from now on. It is expected that, in the near future, commercial flights will take over for the NASA program, this final STS-135 mission is partially due to the fact they are not yet up and running as soon as anticipated.

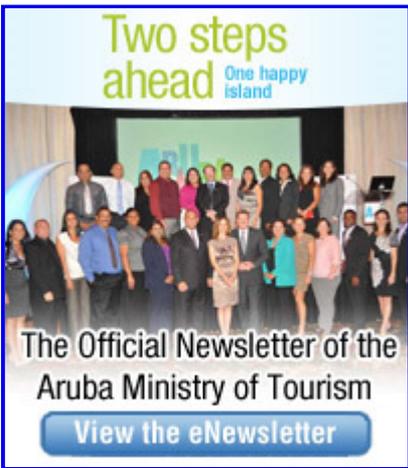
Story courtesy of The Morning News



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