

World's space achievements a bright spot in stressful 2020 19

By MARCIA DUNN
The Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – Astronauts blasted into orbit from the U.S. for the first time in about a decade, three countries sent spacecraft hurtling toward Mars, and robotic explorers grabbed rocks from the moon and gravel from an asteroid for return to Earth.

Space provided moments of hope and glory in an otherwise difficult, stressful year.

It promises to do the same in 2021, with February's landings at Mars and next fall's planned launch of the Hubble Space Telescope's successor – the next-generation James Webb Space Telescope.

Boeing hopes to catch up with SpaceX in the astronaut-launching department, while space tourism may finally get off the ground.

"2021 promises to be as much of a space exploration bright spot, perhaps even more," said Scott Hubbard, NASA's former "Mars Czar" now teaching at Stanford University.

Although the coronavirus pandemic complicated space operations around the globe in 2020, most high-priority missions remained on track, led by the U.S., China and the United Arab Emirates in a stampede to Mars in July.



AP file photo

NASA astronauts Douglas Hurley (left) and Robert Behnken are on their way to Pad 39-A on May 30 at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

The UAE's first interplanetary spacecraft, an orbiter, will scrutinize the Martian atmosphere. NASA's Perseverance rover is set to land Feb. 18 at an ancient river delta and lakebed where microscopic life may have once flourished. The rover will drill into the dry crust, collecting samples for eventual return to Earth.

China's orbiter-rover duo Tianwen-1 – quest for heavenly truth – also will hunt for signs of bygone life.

The European and Russian space agencies skipped the 2020 Mars launch

window, their life-sniffing Mars rover grounded until 2022 because of technical issues and COVID-19 restrictions.

China also set its sights on the moon in 2020, landing and then launching off the lunar surface in December with the first moon rocks collected for return to Earth since the 1970s.

Japan brought back pieces of asteroid Ryugu – its second asteroid batch in a decade. More asteroid samples are on the way: NASA's Osiris-Rex spacecraft vacuumed up handfuls of gravel from aster-

oid Bennu in October for return in 2023.

Elon Musk's SpaceX, meanwhile, was buzzing in 2020. In May, it became the first private company to put people into orbit, an achievement previously claimed by just three global superpowers. The two test pilots were the first NASA astronauts to fly a new brand of spaceship in about 40 years and the first to blast off from Florida since the shuttle program ended in 2011.

In November, four more astronauts rode a SpaceX Dragon capsule to the International Space Station. Three weeks later, SpaceX launched its biggest cargo shipment yet to the space station for NASA.

"This is an impressive achievement which Americans should be proud of," astronaut-turned-senator Mark Kelly said of the Dragon capsule doubleheader.

Until the SpaceX flights, Russia's three-person Soyuz capsules were the only way to get astronauts to the space station once NASA's shuttles shut down.

NASA's other hired crew transporter, Boeing, is scrambling to get its Starliner capsule back in action after a software-spoiled test flight in December 2019. The do-over – again with no one on board – is targeted for spring. If the repairs work and the capsule finally reaches the space station, the first Starliner astronauts could be flying by summer.

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12 Ways to Give a Little is a collaborative effort by Big Brothers Big Sisters of McHenry County and the Northwest Herald.




Inspiration and holiday cheer await those who visit Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center in Crystal Lake

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Countryside
Flower Shop, Nursery, and Garden Center

Inspiration and holiday cheer await those who visit Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center in Crystal Lake.

If you're looking to get more into the holiday spirit this year, look no further than 5301 E Terra Cotta Ave in Crystal Lake!

There you'll find Countryside, transformed into a veritable winter wonderland, complete with breathtaking displays and festive scenes.

"It truly is magical this time of year," said Marcy Cronin, marketing coordinator for the Crystal Lake-based store. "From our life-size gingerbread house to our heartwarming cardinal cove you will be inspired with great ideas for decorating and gift-giving this holiday season."

Need some more inspiration? Countryside has compiled a number of "how-to videos" to follow along with and learn how to elevate your home decor for the holidays.

Some of those tutorials include how to make your own holiday planter from fresh evergreens and how to create an English Garden. Everything you need for the tutorials is available at Countryside Flower

Shop, Nursery and Garden Center. Visit <https://www.countrysideflowershop.com/events/> to see available "How-To" videos.

On the hunt for a Christmas tree? You'll find that too at Countryside. The shop offers a selection of fresh-cut Fraser Fir, Balsam and White Pine trees ready to fill your home with the fragrance of Christmas.

Fresh greenery is the perfect addition to your holiday decor and you'll find plenty in stock at Countryside. Whether it's fresh evergreen roping, wreaths, or holiday planters, all are ready to adorn your home.

Want to incorporate plants into this year's decor? Poinsettias, Christmas Cactus, Cyclamen, and Norfolk Island Pines are just a few of the offerings available at the shop.

"Countryside is one of the most festive places this time of year," Cronin said. "Stop in and be inspired with everything from whimsical to elaborate holiday décor."

**Countryside Flower Shop,
Nursery & Garden Center**
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