

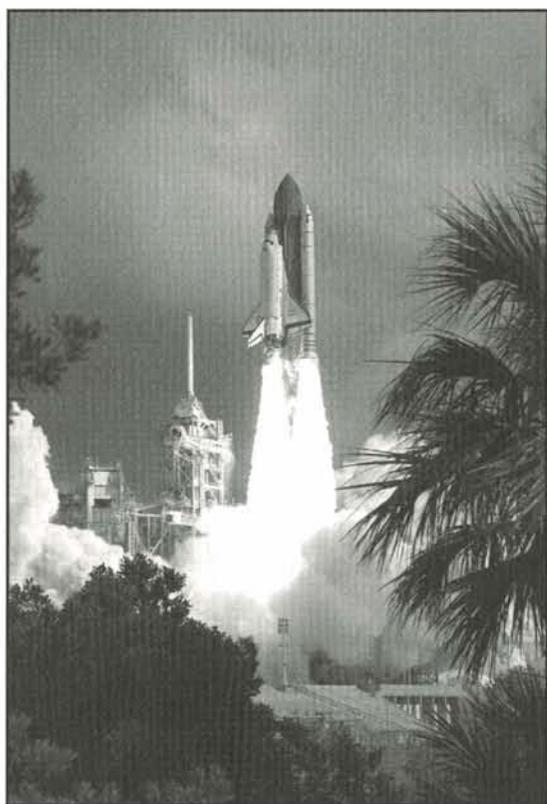
THE
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HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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SPECIAL ISSUE

**CELEBRATING
50TH ANNIVERSARY
NASA IN FLORIDA
(1958-2008)**

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The Florida Historical Quarterly

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Fall 2008

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Cover Illustration: Cover image of shuttle liftoff courtesy of NASA.

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NASA's 50th anniversary

by U.S. Senator Bill Nelson

It was Ronald Reagan who, in his 1986 Challenger address to a mourning nation, noted that we are accustomed to wonders in this country. He rightly observed: "It's hard to dazzle us." But America's space program has been doing just that - and, for 50 years now; even in times of loss, even in times of tragedy.

It's hard to believe, but it was 50 years ago that Dwight Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act, creating America's space agency, NASA. It's equally hard to believe, but it was just a few short years after that - that John F. Kennedy presented a bold challenge before a joint session of Congress: Send a man to the moon and return him safely to Earth by the end of the decade.

Skeptics, of course, thought it could not be done. But NASA's Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions were designed with Kennedy's objective in mind. And, on July 20, 1969, Kennedy's dream became a reality, when two Apollo 11 astronauts left human footprints on the dusty moon. It was, as one of the astronauts insightfully said: a small step for a man, but a giant leap for mankind.

Since then, we've flown the shuttles, built a space station and explored Jupiter and Mars. We've even peered beyond our own solar system, deep into the universe. And now, as America celebrates

Bill Nelson flew as a Payload Specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia (January 12-18, 1986). He was the second sitting member of Congress to fly in space. Nelson served in the U.S. House (1979-1991) and has been in the U.S. Senate since 2001.



Southern Bald Eagles nest in a pine tree overlooking Kennedy Parkway North.
Photo: NASA.

northern Merritt Island and some 20 miles of ocean access. These buffer areas were taken out of public use in 1961 and not included in the wildlife management area. Playalinda Beach, kept in a pristine state as a result of NASA's use of eminent domain, would once again become available for public use after appropriate legislative action. No legislative will existed in 1965, but by 1968 attitudes toward preservation had changed. Governor Claude Kirk and his special assistant Nathaniel Pryor Reed saw the political utility in implementing environmental policies, among them support for preserving Playalinda. Plans drawn by the National Park Service (NPS) outlined the park, including roads and other improvements. Meanwhile, NASA renewed efforts to once again expand its existing wildlife refuge to include the beach, but under very different conditions than the open access planned by the NPS. NASA's efforts triggered the State of Florida to revitalize its efforts to designate a National Seashore managed by the NPS.

The situation set up an interagency rivalry between the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and the NPS, then in negotiations with the State of Florida to manage not only NASA land, but additional beachfront purchased by the state north of KSC. Birdwatchers like the Cruickshanks favored the Bureau's manage-

