

Mid Michigan BUSINESS NOTEBOOK

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CMU prof blasts off as NASA ambassador

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CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Mid Michigan resident and NASA Solar System Ambassador Jim McDonald

Jim McDonald, associate professor of teacher education and professional development, has been reappointed as a NASA Solar System Ambassador, volunteering to deliver educational presentations regarding space-exploration missions and discoveries. McDonald, who specializes in science education, is one of only 10 ambassadors in Michigan and is the only mid-Michigan-based volunteer.

"Ambassadors are space enthusiasts from various walks of life who are interested in providing greater service and inspiration to the community at large," according to the program's website. "Because of the success of the original Galileo Ambassadors program (in 1997, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory) missions exploring Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, asteroids, comets, Earth, the Sun and the Universe now come together to expand the program's scope to the Solar System and beyond."

Most of McDonald's Solar System Ambassador presentations have been to K-12 student audiences, which the former science teacher says he enjoys.

"Kids are really curious about things - what will happen on a space mission, what kind of science is being done - and I do Space Ambassador presentations because of their curiosity," he said. "It's definitely fun."

While schoolchildren are his most common audience, McDonald said he also can speak to church groups, adult civic clubs and other organizations.

McDonald, who in 1987 was a member of the first group of educators to attend Space Camp in Alabama, has been an ambassador since 2001. He has spent numerous summers engaged in research, observation and education with scientists in space science programs around the country.

The program is sponsored by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., which provides visual aids and other materials. The presentations are based on frequently updated information from NASA regarding current and upcoming space missions.