

Nebraska finalist shocked Teacher says he liked McAuliffe

By Jeff Apel
Senior Reporter

A sick feeling overcame Lincoln East journalism teacher James Schaffer as he watched the Space Shuttle Challenger vanish in a cloud of white smoke just after takeoff.

Schaffer, who was one of two Nebraska finalists considered for the Challenger mission, said that he felt like someone had just kicked him in the stomach as he and his fourth-hour class watched the Challenger explode.

"There wasn't anything to say," Schaffer said. "We (the class) saw the shuttle and suddenly it was gone."

Schaffer said he could tell something was wrong with the Challenger after it took off because NASA officials had taught prospective flight candidates about the Challenger.

The problem, he said, arose from either the shuttle's main fuel tank or either one of its boosters.

"I learned enough about (the shuttle) to recognize where the problem was coming from," Schaffer said. "It's a terrible loss and a great tragedy for our country's space program, which was on the verge of its most successful year ever."

Schaffer said at no time did he question NASA officials' decision to launch the Challenger after they previously had delayed its launch date four times.

Although he said he was disappointed

that the delays prevented him from seeing the launch in person, Schaffer said NASA officials would never give in to such disappointments and launch the Challenger before it was safe.

"They (NASA officials) were never prepared to sacrifice safety," he said. Perhaps the U.S. public has become overconfident as far as shuttle safety is concerned, he said.

Schaffer said the mood of his fourth-hour class changed drastically as the students watched the launch on TV.

The class, he said, was working on a project when the Price Is Right was interrupted for the launch. But what followed, he said, was as tragic as President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

The students knew something was terribly wrong, he said.

"They were quiet and subdued."

Schaffer said it will be hard for him to get over the fact that Christa McAuliffe, who was to be the first teacher in space, was killed in the accident.

McAuliffe, he said, had become a friend of his through the NASA training program.

"I thought (McAuliffe) was a very ordinary person. She was a dedicated teacher," Schaffer said. "Today is a very, very sad day for all of us who know Christa."

If NASA officials were to contact him about riding on the shuttle, Schaffer said, he wouldn't have any second thoughts about going. The United States, he said, has done so many great things in space that it would be worth the risk involved.

"I really don't think the dangers involved are going to deter people," he said. "It's going to slow people down a little while, but ultimately I don't think it will be a deterrent."

"I would sure hope there would be several things important enough that a person would give his life for."

Yew plant harmless says horticulturist

YEW from Page 1

The yew plants grow on both city and east campuses, Dasenbrock said, and have been part of UNL's greenery since the formation of the college.

The most common use for the plant is landscaping, Dasenbrock said. It is a "foundation plant," he said, and it is used to accent building entrances, among other things. The small green plants along O Street, he said, are also examples of yew plants.

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