



In just a few short days Friendswood resident Terry Virts will launch into space carrying the well wishes of his community and family.

On Sunday February 7th Virts will accompany five other astronauts as they take off for a 13-day flight from Launch Pad 39 at the Kennedy Space Center. This will be Virts' first flight as he serves as space shuttle pilot, assisting with technical and robotic mission duties. The STS-130 mission team will be led by Commander George Zamka, with Nicholas Patrick, Robert Behnken, Stephen Robinson and Kathryn Hire working as Mission Specialists.

Virts is excited to join the mission and this particular team. "I told my wife when I got assigned to the flight that if I had to pick one flight as my assignment this would be it, because of the crew we have and the modules we will bring up," Virts said. "It's rare to bring up one module. We get to bring up two and activate both of them."

Just as he appreciates his team his Commander is glad to have Virts aboard. "I'm very fortunate to have Terry on the crew. He's a wonderful guy," Zamka said. Virts personable attitude and kind demeanor is paralleled by his experience despite this being his first launch into outer space. In July of 2000 Virts was selected as a NASA pilot and became a member of the 18th group of astronaut candidates. He served as a Shuttle Avionics Integration Laboratory (SAIL) test crew member and as an Expedition 9 crew support astronaut.

For this mission Virts is looking forward to his tasks, and Zamka is confident he'll do well. Talking about the flight Virts said, "I'm a pilot. So, launch, landing, rendezvous, those kinds of things are what I am focused on in this mission. Commander George Zamka will fly the rendezvous and docking. Then I get to fly the un-docking and I'll do a fly around, a big loop about 600 feet from the space station. That'll be fun. That's a big task."

While his team is beside him the Friendswood community is behind him, encouraging him all the way. What better way to approach such a big task than with community and family support behind you? He and his family attend Heritage Park Baptist Church in Webster and have had

numerous people praying for them and for his mission. “I have received a huge amount of support from the community, lots of emails and people coming to my launch. People from my church have been praying for me; they’ve given me a huge amount of support,” Virts shared. “The Friendswood community has been great.”

But the thing he is perhaps most looking forward to? “Getting the chance to look out into the blue.”

“Every view that I get will be my first,” Virts said. “I think that’s going to be really special to see that view of the earth and of space, and to hopefully get some good pictures of sunrises and sunsets.” Something even his family and friends can look forward to on Virts’ return to earth.