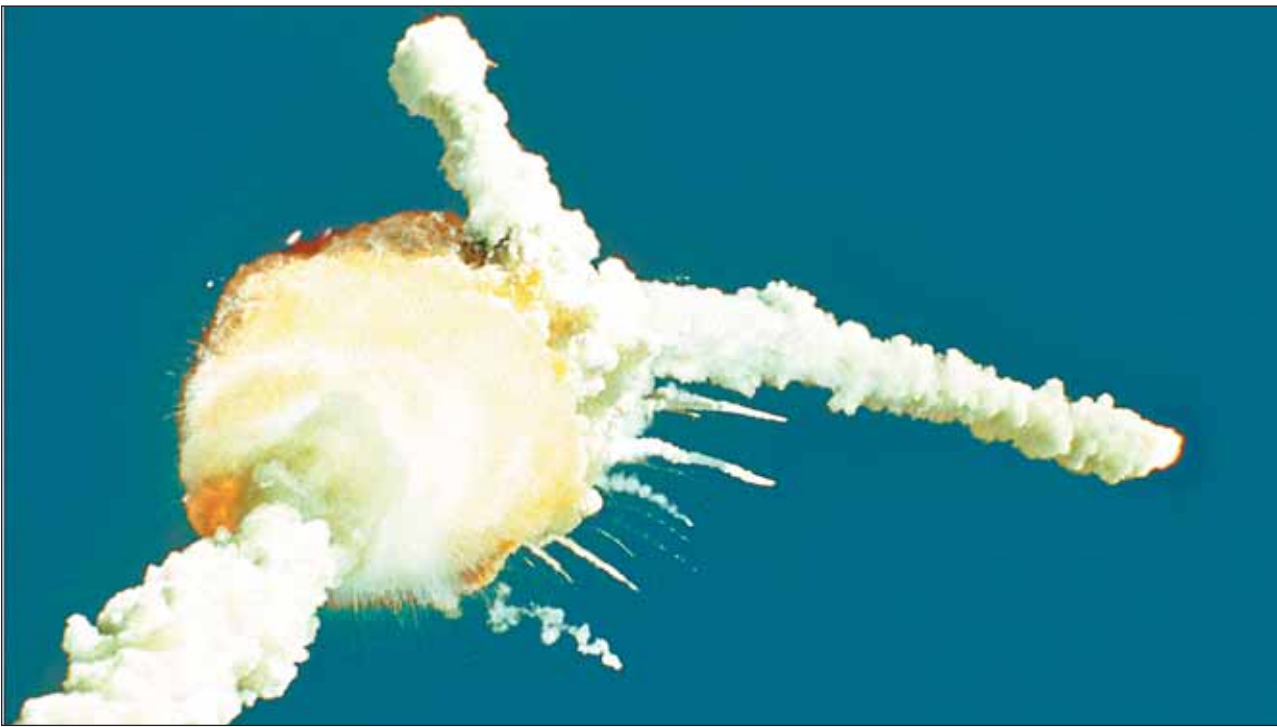
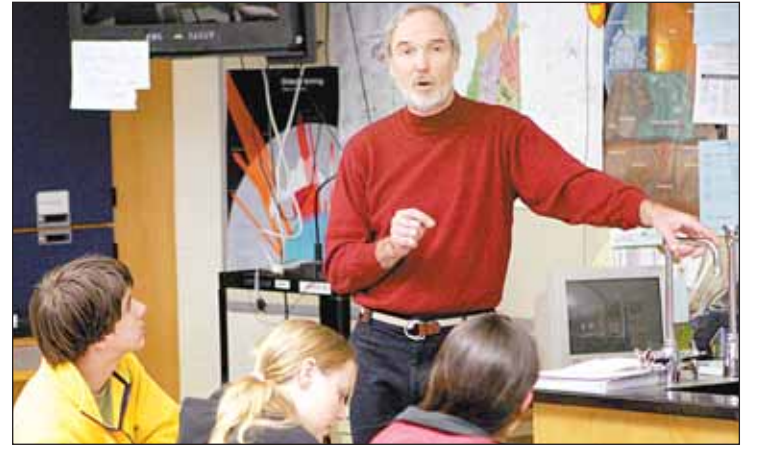


20 YEARS LATER: REMEMBERING CHALLENGER

# LEARNING FROM LOSS



The space shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after lifting off from Kennedy Space Center on Jan. 28, 1986. All seven crew members died in the explosion, which was blamed on faulty O-rings in the booster rockets. The 20th anniversary of the disaster is Saturday.



Philip Browne teaches at Concord High School in Concord, N.H., on Wednesday. On each anniversary of the Challenger explosion, which took the life of Concord teacher Christa McAuliffe, Browne teaches about space travel, from the Mercury program through the International Space Station. Browne was a finalist in the contest that selected McAuliffe as the first teacher in space.

## Hometown recalls lost teacher's life

By DAVID TIRRELL WYSOCKI  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONCORD, N.H.

It was just as Christa McAuliffe would have wanted.

The Concord (N.H.) High School teacher and her six crewmates on the space shuttle Challenger appear chronologically, with no special billing, in a school lesson on space travel.



McAULIFFE

It was just as she once taught, that ordinary people make history. Except this time, she was the ordinary person and the history was a disaster 20 years ago Saturday that wounded the school and city so deeply that the slightest touch still can bring tears.

This week, as he has done for 19 previous anniversaries, biology teacher Philip Browne taught his students about space travel, from the Mercury missions to the space station. As McAuliffe did in her social studies classes, Browne kept it simple.

He demonstrated the size of the shuttle's cargo bay with an illustration of it holding a Trailways bus; he showed how the parts of its solid rocket booster were stacked together like round Lego

blocks, sealed with huge rubber washers called O-rings.

And he explained what could happen if those O-rings got cold and brittle, as they did on Jan. 28, 1986, allowing flames to escape and hit the shuttle's huge fuel tank.

"A rubber O-ring failed, the flames leaked out, burned through the orange (fuel) tank, exploded the oxygen and hydrogen, and the shuttle never made it into orbit," said Browne, 57, who was one of four other New Hampshire finalists in the national competition that eventually selected McAuliffe to be the first teacher in space.

Around each anniversary, he takes his classes to McAuliffe's grave and the nearby planetarium built in her honor. In class, Browne calmly and expertly explains the science, but in an interview afterward, a single word, a question about the cemetery sojourn, brings him to tears: "Why?"

Taking a deep breath to fight sobs, he responds: "I don't want anybody to forget ... their bravery, their dedication. They were people who loved life. They wanted something better for the world."

Assistant Principal Bill Haubrich said the anniversary presents an annual dilemma.

"There is a legacy here. How do we promote the legacy, and not promote that particular day that was the most painful day in our school's history?" he asked.

## 'It was one of those defining moments in your life'

By MIKE SCHNEIDER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

Twenty years ago, space shuttle Challenger blew apart into jets of fire and plumes of smoke, a terrifying sight witnessed by the families of the astronauts and onlookers who came to watch the launch of the first teacher in space.

The disaster shattered NASA's image and the belief that spaceflight could become routine. The investigation revealed a space agency more concerned with schedules and public relations than safety.

Seventeen years later, seven more astronauts were lost on the shuttle Columbia, leading many to conclude NASA had not learned the lessons of Challenger.

Joining teacher Christa McAuliffe on the doomed Jan. 28, 1986, flight were commander Dick Scobee, pilot Mike Smith and astronauts Ellison Onizuka, Judy Resnik, Ron McNair and Greg Jarvis.

"It was one of those defining moments in your life that you will always remember," said U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., who had flown on the shuttle mission pre-

**"The knowledge we gained was gained only through many, many losses. That is the perspective through which we must look at our losses in spaceflight."**

Michael Griffin  
NASA administrator

ceding Challenger. "Because in 1986, the space shuttle was the symbol of technological prowess of the United States and all the sudden it's destroyed in front of everybody's eyes."

On Saturday, a ceremony remembering the Challenger accident is planned at Kennedy Space Center.

Challenger was brought down just after liftoff by a poorly designed seal in the shuttle's solid rocket booster, which has since been redesigned and has performed without problems. It will be used on the next-generation vehicle with plans to return astronauts to the moon and later to Mars.

"We learned how to design solid rocket boosters ... with no further failures," NASA administrator Michael Griffin said. "We got that from the Challenger crew, so that is part of the learning process, I'm afraid."

The Challenger disaster came in an era of tighter budgets and a constant need to justify the shuttle program. NASA had hoped sending a teacher into space would win back some public interest.

The night before Challenger's liftoff, engineers from NASA contractor Morton Thiokol recommended against a launch because data showed that cold temperatures compromised the O-rings' resiliency.

Under perceived pressure from NASA managers, Thiokol managers reversed themselves and went against the recommendation not to launch, according to the investigation into the disaster.

Griffin said he is reminded of the early days of the air transport system when scores of test pilots died in plane accidents.

"The knowledge we gained was gained only through many, many losses," Griffin said. "That is the perspective through which we must look at our losses in spaceflight."

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