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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blast Off with Major New Space Exhibition

Connecticut Science Center Unveils Solar System, Space Travel and Space Station Experience

Hartford, CT (December 11, 2024) – The Connecticut Science Center has announced its largest new exhibition, a hands-on immersive experience, ***Exploring Space***, opening to the public this Saturday, December 14. The new exhibition stretches 4,200 square feet to take visitors on an immersive and educational journey through the cosmos.

Exploring Space invites visitors of all ages to discover the wonders of space. Through Earth-based astronomy, human exploration, and deep-space observation, the exhibition expands our understanding of the universe and prepares us for distant missions. Visitors become part of the adventure with hands-on activities, multimedia, artifacts, and personal stories, experiencing liftoff, traveling through the solar system, exploring deep space, and stepping into a space-station environment to discover the challenges and excitement of life in space.

“This reimagined gallery captures the spirit of exploration and discovery, allowing visitors of all ages to experience the wonders of our universe like never before,” said Matt Fleury, President & CEO of the Connecticut Science Center. “As we push the boundaries of what’s possible in space, we also aim to inspire future innovators and pioneers who will lead us into the next chapter of exploration.”

Through three primary sections, the ***Exploring Space*** exhibition transports visitors through the makeup of our own solar system, the technological challenges and solutions used to reach deeper into space and the discoveries and theories beyond:

Our Solar Neighborhood | Our solar system is much more than the Sun and its eight planets—it’s a vast, dynamic “neighborhood.” By studying our local space, we gain insight into the broader galaxy. How stars and planets form, interact, and emit energy here applies just as well a million light years away. In the Solar Neighborhood, visitors can experience the brand-new **Gravity Jump** - choose a life-sized, space-suited avatar and watch it appear on different planetary surfaces projected on the wall. When you jump, the avatar mirrors your movements, with varying results depending on the planet. On Venus, your jump is similar to Earth’s, but on a small asteroid, your avatar might soar to the gallery’s rafters.

Exploring the Universe | The Sun is just one of hundreds of billions of stars in our Milky Way galaxy, which is itself one of countless galaxies in a universe possibly 93 billion light years across. To study these distant realms, we use specialized tools on Earth and in space to analyze light and energy from faraway objects, applying knowledge from our solar system to stars and planets beyond. Each discovery deepens

our understanding—from potential signs of life to the forces shaping mass and energy, to the origins of the universe. Featured in this section of the exhibition is the digital **Spacesuit Fashion Show**, showcasing spacesuit technology, past, present, and future. From Gemini-era suits to today's Extravehicular Mobility Units and prototypes for future Moon or Mars missions. Each suit includes highlights of special features, astronaut stories, and cross-sections showing the layers that protect explorers in extreme environments.

The Future in Space | Wherever we travel in space, human ingenuity will lead the way—planning missions, building equipment, and solving problems. Our needs will remain the same: sustenance, protection, and companionship. Thriving in space will require science, engineering, and a commitment to our shared humanity. Step aboard the Space Station and snap a selfie sitting on a **space toilet**. Here visitors can discover how real astronauts train to use the toilet in microgravity and explore the surprising history of space bathrooms.

“The Connecticut Science Center is a beacon for Hartford, inspiring curiosity and connecting our youth with the sciences that power our state’s economy,” said Len Wolman, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. “The new *Exploring Space* exhibition reflects our commitment to presenting the latest advancements in science and technology, as a premier destination for STEM education.”

“I am so excited to welcome visitors to the newly reimagined **Exploring Space** exhibit! Connecticut is home to a thriving aerospace industry, and through this gallery, the Science Center is not just educating children on the universe around them but helping them to explore what a future career in STEM might look like,” said Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz. “Exposure to STEM fields at an early age helps to foster creativity, develop critical thinking skills, and inspire an interest in possible future careers. I want to thank Connecticut Science Center and their supporters for continuously investing in our youngest residents, providing them an exciting new space to have fun and learn at the same time.”

The exhibition illustrates the significant role of Connecticut innovators in space exploration. A model Vulcan rocket, donated by United Launch Alliance, is displayed alongside a real frangible joint, made by Connecticut’s Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense. This joint enables rocket stages to separate with controlled explosions during launch, a technology still used in many space missions today.

“We at Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense are thrilled to celebrate the launch of the new **Exploring Space** exhibition at the Connecticut Science Center,” said Dave Kametz, Vice President of Engineering & Interim Vice President of Operations for Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense. “This exhibition is the latest chapter in a longstanding partnership that began in the early days of the Science Center. Through exhibitions such as **Exploring Space**, we aim to spark curiosity in students and communities, empowering them to shape the future of space exploration. We are honored to be part of this important work.”

Not only does **Exploring Space** celebrate Connecticut’s rich aerospace history, it also aims to inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers, and explorers. By connecting the hands-on interactives in the exhibit to science topics and highlighting STEM career pathways, **Exploring Space** brings together the vital intersection of education, innovation, and curiosity.

The exhibition also recognizes the frequent intersections of space exploration and popular culture. One of the artifacts on display is the battered nose cone of the suborbital rocket that carried the ashes of James Doohan—Star Trek’s “Mr. Scott”—into space is signed by his family, friends, and colleagues.

Exploring Space opens to the public on Saturday, December 14 and is included with a paid General Admission or Connecticut Science Center Membership. Tickets and more information on the exhibition can be found at CTScienceCenter.org/Exploring-Space.

Exploring Space is supported by The Barnes Group Foundation, and Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense. This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum & Library Services with generous support from the State of Connecticut Department of Economic & Community Development.

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About the Connecticut Science Center: Located in downtown Hartford, the LEED Gold-certified Connecticut Science Center ignites creativity and fosters a love for science through engaging, hands-on interactive experiences—all while maintaining a commitment to environmental sustainability. With more than 165 hands-on exhibits, the Science Center explores a wide range of topics, including space and earth sciences, biology, the Connecticut River watershed, alternative energy, physical sciences, Connecticut's inventors and innovations, and more.

Highlights include the state's year-round butterfly habitat, a dedicated children's gallery, five educational labs, a 200-seat 3D digital theater, a function room, and a gift store. The Science Center also hosts events for all ages throughout the year.

As a nonprofit organization, the Connecticut Science Center is committed to enhancing science education across Connecticut and New England, providing enriching learning opportunities for students and adults alike.

For more information, visit CTScienceCenter.org or call (860) SCIENCE.