Jul23

Kelly

Ride of a Lifetime

A team from RIT experienced zero gravity while flying aboard NASA's Vomit Comet! I had the honor of going to Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, last week to cover the RIT team of James Craven, Greg Sharp, Christopher Ubelacker and Jarret Whetstone, all part of RIT's imaging and photographic technology program in RIT's College of Imaging Arts and Sciences.

NASA calls the C-9 aircraft the Weightless Wonder, but it's more commonly known as the Vomit Comet because sometimes its passengers expel their breakfast or lunch during the flight as the plane does a series of parabolas (about 32!) over the Gulf of Mexico. The plane did live up to nickname for several members of our team and the other university teams!

Teams from the University of Texas at Austin, University of Southern Maine, Rhodes College and University of New Mexico flew on July 17 and 18 along with our team.
The Weightless Wonder is used as a research aircraft for student experiments. The C-9 is part of NASA's Reduced Gravity Student Flight Opportunities Program

RIT tested the feasibility of inkjet printing in a weightless environment. The team's proposal was among one of about forty undergraduate proposals accepted based on scientific and outreach merits. It's a very competitive selection process with NASA receiving 80 proposals this year.

To execute their experiment, the team constructed something that looks like a phone booth tipped on its side. Inside the "phone booth" were two inkjet printers. A high speed camera was also mounted to the inside of the "phone booth." It documented the ink drops shooting out of the print heads. The images captured the velocity and direction of the inkdrops.

Simultaneously, the printers generated test targets varying from detailed pictures to images of lines and shapes. The objective of the test targets was to see if there were differences in print quality in a weightless environment.

In addition to spending time with the team, I also got to meet several alumni who work for NASA. RIT has about 15 alumni who work for Johnson Space Center.

Two of them are in the accompanying photograph. Robert Markowitz, a 1989 graduate, is on the far left. Lauren Harnett, a 2007 graduate, is next to Robert. Both are alumni of the imaging and photographic technology program. Lauren and Robert shot video and photographs aboard the Vomit Comet. Next to Lauren is Chris, James, Greg, and Jarret. Chris Ubelacker, the team leader for RIT, will describe his experience in an upcoming blog entry.

Submit Comment

About us

The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of RIT University News—the news and public relations division of Rochester Institute of Technology. Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

more about us »

Recent Comments

- John / Jul 24**The 'abolishionist' is corrected**
- Justin / Jul 17**RIT goes west**
- Jeff / Jul 12**Shine on, classic beauties!**
- Brennan / Jun 24**Shine on, classic beauties!**
- Will / Jun 17**What to do with all that hardware?**
- David / Jun 14**Shine on, classic beauties!**
- Nancy / Jun 13**Shine on, classic beauties!**
- Mike / Jun 2**Time is running out to talk back to University News**
- Ralph / May 30**Time is running out to talk back to University News**
- John / May 19**Sensationalism trumps accuracy in Channel 10 news story**