

Noatak teacher may win space trip

by Beverly Patkotak Grinage
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A Noatak teacher was one of two Alaskan finalists selected to compete for a trip to space. As of last week Richard Houghton said, "I'm still weightless—I haven't come down to earth yet."

Houghton was one of 63 Alaskan teachers who applied for the unprecedented trip. The other winner was Jan Heinrich, a teacher from the Anchorage Service High School. Houghton and

Heinrich will compete with two finalists from each of the other 49 states.

The winner will blast off with astronauts in 1986 on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) flight. According to a recent press release Commissioner of Education Harold Reynolds said, "the intent of this opportunity is for the teacher to help communicate the space flight experience to the public."

Houghton has been teaching science and math at the Napaaqtugmiut High School in Noatak for the past four years, before that he taught in Kivalina for one year. Altogether, he has been teaching for a total of eleven years.

Among the criteria used to select the two teachers were their creativity and originality in sharing the flight experience with the American public, a professional background, commitment in teaching, community involvement and knowledge about local community, regional, national and international issues.

Houghton said his two kids are still pretty young to understand what's going on, but when they saw him jumping around the house they became pretty excited too. He said his wife is pretty hopeful that an Alaskan teacher will be selected for the space trip.

In response to the question of why he wants to go to space he said, "I think it's an excellent opportunity for a public educator to shine—to be in the public eye."

If he's selected he will be required to maintain a relationship with NASA for one year after the

flight and be available for public lectures, consultation and other activities. One of Houghton's goals after the flight is to produce the first space travel log with photographs and tapes of sounds from outer-space.

While in space, Houghton said he would teach a class in space and have it broadcast on public television.

Last year, Houghton along with six senior-high students and another chaperone, travelled to Orlando, Florida to visit the NASA Space Center. During the trip he developed some curriculum around a program called Earth Bound Astronauts from the University of Houston.

The curriculum was a learning experience for the students involving amusement park rides. For example he said, "on a roller coaster ride you experience a sense of weightlessness." They also learned about G (gravity) forces and others like the centrifugal force.

The Napaaqtugmiut principal said of Houghton, "he's a superb teacher; very creative, innovative. He uses a lot of audio-visual techniques in his classroom. He's been NEA (Na-

tional Education Association) president for the district this past year.

"He's taught several workshops on student-team learning at NEA and at the Small Schools Conference." She also said that this year the school in Noatak has been very positive. "They've been first in sports--this just adds to it," said Burgess.

Houghton said he spent a lot of time on his application, but after it was reviewed in Washington, D.C. the mail courier lost 26 out of 63 applications that were being mailed back to Alaska. As a result, Houghton had to apply twice. "Had to redo the ten page application and get three recommendations again," said Houghton.

Houghton, along with Heinrich, will be traveling to Juneau to produce video tapes to be used by a national selection panel. Then they will travel to Washington D.C. for some interviews at the end of June. After that, ten semi-finalists will be selected to go to the Johnson Space Center in Houston for medical examinations and a briefing before the final selection is made.