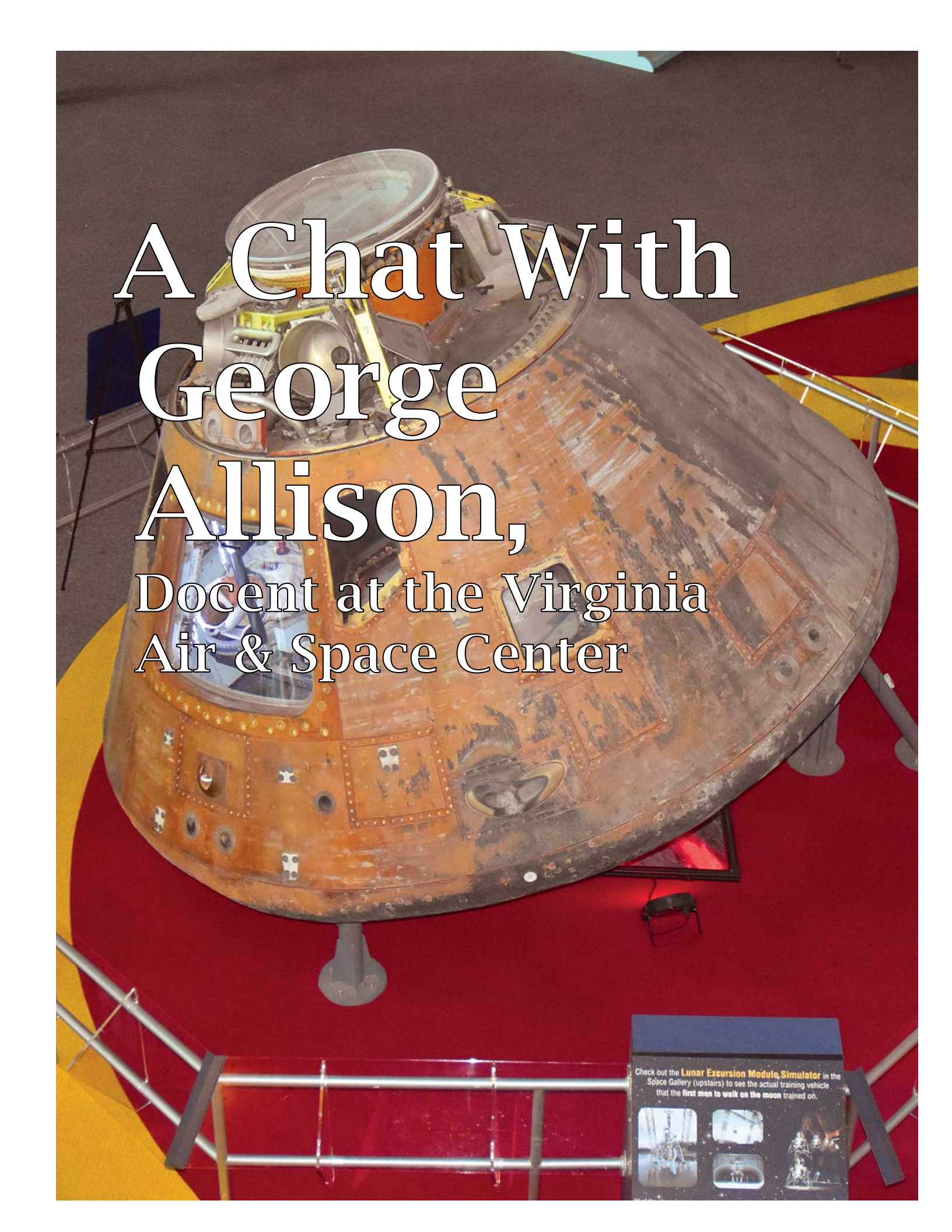




A Chat With George Allison, Docent at the Virginia Air & Space Center

Check out the **Lunar Excursion Module Simulator** in the Space Gallery (upstairs) to see the actual training vehicle that the first men to walk on the moon trained on.



A Conversation with George Allison

By Mike Jones

Photos by Judy Norton

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During my tour of the Virginia Center, I had the opportunity to spend twenty minutes with George Allison, who has been a docent at the Center for more than a decade. Here are some of his comments, lightly edited for brevity and clarity:

What's your background?

I worked for NASA. I was at Langley, since 1975 until 2011, and came to this Center in 2013, so I've been doing this for about ten years. I came in when the Apollo program was



ending, my first launch of a rocket was the first space shuttle launch with John Young and Bob Crippen. I met a lot of the astronauts. I met Mike Collins, Frank Borman, Fred Hayes, Bob Crippen, Victor Glover, and many of the others. Most of the ones I met were space shuttle astronauts.

What's your bet on the Orion capsule? Will it work?

The Orion program is big. Like, we just had an open house out there at Langley, and 40,000 people showed up, way more than we expected. (He laughed.) We tried to screen everybody through metal detectors and that didn't work very well, so finally we just let them all in. We didn't have any problems.

But my point is that Astronaut Glover was at our open house, and he's one of the astronauts who will be going back around the moon in 2024. They're in training right now. Thirty men have orbited the Moon already, with Apollo. Now they think we'll have four more in 2024, and then we'll have people walking around on the moon in 2026. I think it's going to be later than that, they don't even have the descent system built yet, so there's some work to do. But it will be done.



On the left, the actual Apollo 12 capsule that went to the moon. On the right, a prototype of the new Orion capsule, which is expected to take the next group of explorers back to the Moon. It's much larger than the Apollo capsule and will feature enormous upgrades in electronics, sensors, communications and performance, but still won't offer any privacy. Or a bathroom.

It seems that modern space flight is so much easier and safer than in the days of Apollo.

You got that wrong. We're still learning what we need to be doing. The space station has been up there 23 years, since 2000. You remember Scott Kelly and Mark Kelly, who are identical twins? Scott stayed on earth and his brother

Mark spent a year on the space station. Mark came back and when they compared their DNA, they found Mark's DNA had changed!

Now Mark was still within the Earth's magnetic field, so he was getting some protection from radiation. But once you leave that and get out into deeper space you lose that protection. Going to the Moon or to Mars, you're out in that radiation for weeks or months. That's a real problem. Nothing safe about it.

There's lots more to learn. How do we protect them from the radiation? How do we increase their exercise program, so they don't lose muscle mass and bone mass? They've even found the eyeballs of the astronauts change when you've been in space a long time. Sometimes they don't go back to the way they were before they went up. So, there's a lot of research that's being done and needs to be done on long-term space flight. In fact, the space station was going to be cancelled and de-orbited between 2027 and 2030, but now they're going to extend the space station beyond 2030, for that research.

What's this badge?

We give these stickers to the kids. It says, "Spaceship Earth. Earthbound astronaut going 67,000 mph." I give these to the kids. It's really hard for them to understand how we can be moving so fast, but nothing seems to be moving. And that's not even counting the rotation of the Earth, or the movement of the whole solar system. It's wonderful to talk to these kids.

About the Author

Dr. Mike Jones is an entrepreneur who uses his business expertise to help G.A. airports across the country improve their governance and operations. He's been writing for this magazine for nearly a decade, flown 800 Young Eagle missions, and put 4,000 hours in his logbook. He's always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

