

Astronaut visits Stockton alma mater

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STOCKTON - The astronaut looked back at the teachers and the students sitting in the Franklin High School auditorium, where he sat 26 years ago.

"I see so much of myself in your faces," he said.

The students looked forward - toward a man who said his family is like their families, who struggled before he succeeded, who lived in a house "right out here, off of Waterloo."

Jose Hernandez, a 1980 graduate of Franklin High, completed astronaut training in February. On Thursday morning, he returned to his alma mater.

Hernandez, 43, told students to accept help from those who offer it, to set goals that seem impossible to realize and to take seriously their education.

That, he said, is how the child of migrant farm workers became an astronaut in line for a shuttle mission to space.

"I was in no better situation than what you guys are in," Hernandez said. "If I'm able to do it, why aren't you?"

After graduating from Franklin, Hernandez went to University of the Pacific, where he earned a degree in electrical engineering in 1984.

Interim Superintendent Carl Toliver welcomed him back to Stockton, and to Franklin High, home of the Yellow Jackets.

"Here is your Yellow Jacket, your astronaut," Toliver said. Students screamed and clapped. Some took pictures with camera phones.

Antonia Munoz, a sophomore, said it was "crazy" that a Franklin graduate could be an astronaut.

"We're like one of the bottom schools," said the 16-year-old, who wants to be a doctor. "It's pretty much amazing."

To get him to where he is today took help from teachers, Hernandez said.

He recalled his family's annual trips from Stockton to Mexico - leaving in November, returning in March. One year, a teacher visited his parents at home and urged them to stay put so the children wouldn't lose school days. They did.

Later, in junior high school, Hernandez said, he struggled at English but excelled at math. Another teacher, Dave Ellis, developed a special math program to challenge him.

"His English wasn't that strong, but he said his math class was too easy," said Ellis, who transferred to Franklin and will retire at the end of this school year.



Astronaut Jose Hernandez returns to his alma mater, Franklin High School, to speak about becoming an astronaut Thursday.

Credit: Calixtro Romias/Record

Hernandez left junior high already having studied geometry.

"The bottom line here is, folks, even though you feel like you can take the world on by yourself, don't take the world on by yourself," Hernandez said. "Accept the help of others."

Michael Tubbs, a sophomore, said he appreciated Hernandez's return to Franklin.

"I think it's very nice of him to come back and inspire us," said Tubbs, who wants to be a U.S. president.

Hernandez said Tubbs, 15, already has his vote.

"Anything is possible," Hernandez added. "We have been given a lot of opportunities. We just need to take advantage of them."

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Stockton-raised astronaut Jose Hernandez will make several appearances in Stockton this weekend.

- He will deliver the commencement address at the University of the Pacific graduation at 8:30 a.m. Saturday. Hernandez, a 1984 Pacific graduate, is scheduled to speak along with Academy Award-winning actor and director Clint Eastwood during the ceremony at the Alex G. Spanos Center.
 - He is also scheduled to speak at 6 p.m. Saturday at the Stockton Memorial Civic Auditorium as part of the Stockton-San Joaquin Public Library's One Book, One San Joaquin program. The event is free and open to the public. For information, call (209) 837-8221 or (866) 805-7323.
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