

Rita forces astronaut, family to leave home

By NEIL GONZALES
Record Staff Writer
Published Friday, Sep 23, 2005

A Cessna plane circled above Jose Hernandez and his fellow astronaut candidates as they hiked through a Wyoming mountain range as part of their NASA training earlier this week. The plane rocked its wings back and forth to signal the group to call headquarters.

Hernandez, a former Stockton resident, and his classmates learned they needed to leave that part of their training immediately and make arrangements to evacuate their families from their Houston homes in advance of Hurricane Rita.

Early Thursday, Hernandez reunited with his wife and their five young children at a friend's house in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I'm saddened by what could be waiting for us in Houston after the hurricane passes," Hernandez said by cell phone. "But the most important thing is here with me right now."



Hernandez, a graduate of Franklin High School and University of the Pacific in Stockton, is among the current 11-member astronaut class training primarily out of Johnson Space Center in Houston. But Hurricane Rita has now put that training on hold.

Astronaut Jose Hernandez, a Franklin High School graduate, talks to students at the San Joaquin County Office of Education in August 2004.

Credit: Craig Sanders/The Record

"They told us not to worry about going to work Monday," Hernandez said.

As Hernandez flew back to Texas from Wyoming, his wife, Adela, packed their children and some belongings in their sport utility vehicle and got on the highway to Fort Worth.

"She's the real hero," Hernandez said.

"I think I was pretty calm," Adela Hernandez said. "The kids were so good and were helping."

The drive north, however, was not as accommodating because of all the other people evacuating the Houston area.

"It was bumper to bumper," she said. A trip that usually takes five hours took 13 hours.

"We're just happy to see Jose," she said.

Contact reporter Neil Gonzales at 209 367-7428 or ngonzale@recordnet.com