

NEWS

Stunned for words, Nichols alum safely touches back down to earth from space trip

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In the span of 10 minutes, 4 seconds, six crew members aboard the New Shepard, Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos' rocket, flew to the edge of space Thursday before floating down safely back to Earth.

The crew, which included Nichols College alumnus Marty Allen, finally took off from West Texas at approximately 9:57 a.m. Thursday after the flight was delayed twice, the first time because of crew change and the second due to high winds.

The brief mission was the fourth Blue Origin human spaceflight.

"It's gonna take me a couple of days to process but my first reactions were, first the world ain't flat. That's number one. It's definitely round," Allen said in an interview with the Telegram and Gazette.

Allen said that the entire experience was "unbelievable" and "hard to put into words."

"You're so high up, space is so black, you can't believe it and you can see how thin the atmosphere is," Allen said. It's like taking a line with a pencil. One side of that line is solid black, the other side you see our atmosphere."

Allen and his crewmates had received several days of training before the launch and during the training, Allen's excitement shifted from the weightlessness the crew would experience at that height to the views they would be seeing.

"When we got up there, to me the weightlessness was like 5% of the experience and 95% was looking out the window," Allen said. "Once we unhooked and then we're floating inside the capsule, yeah, that was ... neat."

He said he would have appreciated the weightlessness more if they had more time to float around and do things such as somersaults.

One aspect of the weightlessness he enjoyed, he said, was that the seat belts they were strapped in with stayed in place after he unbuckled.

"I placed the seat belts ... in a vertical position, and they just stood there, they didn't move. It was so neat," Allen said.

Before their descent, while looking at the planet, Allen said he realized how "insignificant each of us are on Earth."

"You look at this whole planet, and you got the little people running around, I mean ... it's bigger than that," he said. "Our planet from that altitude ... it was just gorgeous."

As the rocket ascended some 62 miles to the edge of space known as Low Earth Orbit, the booster and capsule separated.

The crew, according to stats tweeted by Blue Origin, reached a max velocity of 2,236 mph.

"The descent, we hit the five Gs (forces) coming down and that was amazing because boy, if I tried to lift my arm up, just slammed your arm right back down onto the armrest," Allen said.

With three large red and blue parachutes billowing above the capsule, the crew landed at approximately 10:07 a.m. in the West Texas desert.

Although the capsule made a loud thud and kicked up dust upon its arrival, Allen said it looked worse on video than it was in reality.

"The jolt of landing probably wasn't any worse than if I hit the rear end of your car at about 10 miles an hour," Allen said. "It's like coming down in a hot air balloon."

He hopes space travel will evolve in a way that will allow all people to experience it in the same way airplane travel became more common with commercialization in the 1950s.

"This is the future and it's going to come at us really fast. If you look at other industries ... like Silicon Valley ... look at the speed at which we went from our very first computers to laptops to the iPhone, it moved so fast. It's gonna do the same

thing," Allen said.

He said after the government discontinued the shuttle program and other space travel programs, the industry went dormant but private enterprise is beginning to drive interest in the industry again.

"Blue Origin already has 7,000 employees and are hiring like 100 employees a week, so it's growing fast," Allen said. "It's going to be a huge industry ... This is going to just explode and grow."

He said that other companies such as Elon Musk's SpaceX and the government are looking to work together to get things such as satellites and other byproducts into space.

Allen said he had advice for the students at Nichols, where a viewing party was held for the campus community to watch the livestream.

"If they want a career, learn business and go into the space industry because there's got to be the future," he said. "I wish I were a student at Nichols today because I know what the future is going to hold and ... all of those students, one day, will be up in space, it's going to become that common."

Allen was joined by Sharon and Marc Hagle, Jim Kitchen, Dr. George Nield and Gary Lai. Lai replaced "Saturday Night Live" star Pete Davidson after he dropped out days before the launch was originally scheduled for March 23.

The flight was delayed until March 29 and then was delayed again until Thursday due to high winds in West Texas near the launch site.

"I've done a lot of things in my life but nothing can come close to this," Allen said. "I mean nothing."

The livestreamed launch can be viewed on the Blue Origin YouTube page.