

Coffee powder or beans?

Just my cup of coffee...



Launching new technologies while stepping over cow pies

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CLICKSOR

As I start to write this column, I click to open a blank document. Yet, I have been writing this in my mind since I hit the send button on the last one. There's really no blank document, just a page waiting for words. Here they come. I feel like I am talking to my friends when I write. I store things in the two weeks between columns, then share them with you. this week started off with the rescheduling of our student launch for May 20. The drop test of a new system to pull out the parachute was necessary, and while the test was successful, some flight hardware was damaged and we had to reschedule. Bummer. I know some of my readers are retired. But if you want to come to my launch, now's the time to register at launchnm.com. I think about what is going on at the spaceport. I write with the hope you feel you are a part of this project. I write to share the pioneering spirit of those involved in this effort. if possible, I paint pictures so you can put yourself out there with us – like you are reading notes from a field expedition. Because believe me, on Saturday, April 2, that's what it was, an expedition, with people in rental vehicles, taking the back road to the spaceport, in the dark, to watch the first launch of a new rocket. The Tube Rocket "Stig" built by Armadillo Aerospace. The "Stig" launch was the second of two launches scheduled at Spaceport America last week. Mine was scheduled for Friday, April 1st, the Stig launch was scheduled for Saturday, April 2. I was invited to observe by Armadillo, as I hope to purchase a vehicle from them for our students in the future. At 4:30 a.m. Saturday, I met Dr. Bill Gutman, a physicist and spaceport employee, and Gabe Baca from NASA in the parking lot behind Starbucks on University Avenue. we drove out to the spaceport early, as Bill wanted to be there early to make sure all was ready for the 8 a.m. launch. Bill mentioned he'd been out at the launch site mowing the weeds the day before to keep the fire hazard down. We arrived at the spaceport around 5:15 a.m. it was still dark, but the circular launch pad was lit, the generator whirling away and the Armadillo crew in blue was working. Fifteen hundred feet away in the viewing area, the rest of us, including the firemen and women, and security were watching the launch pad. in the emerging dawn, people were moving around the rocket. we could barely observe the rocket's fueling procedures, the large crane supporting the rocket and the fuel truck. The rocket uses liquid oxygen and nitrogen among other propellants. Things were starting to happen, and brother it was cold. People started arriving in the viewing area by 6:30 a.m. Two people from the FAA arrived. they drove themselves because they wanted to learn the road. they followed Lou Gomez, another spaceport employee. Lou had a flat. Did I mention it was dark? Then six Purdue University students and their professor arrived; they had an experiment on the rocket. Dawn was turning to daybreak as the launch command crew set up the \$40 tables from Walmart and microwave antennae to communicate flight procedures to the rocket crew. I have been to lots of launch facilities, and have seen my share of control rooms. this was the first time I ever stepped over cow pies while listening to

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launch controllers. That's the pioneering part I mentioned. Robert Goddard and Werner von Braun probably stepped in their share of manure now that I think about it. we did not witness a launch on Saturday. That's two for two last week. But I did see steeled focus, a skilled, perfectly coordinated team working, problem solving and a team focused on the next horizon. The launch. Armadillo plans to operate from Spaceport America eventually. that would bring the number of companies flying out of Spaceport America to three – Virgin Galactic, UP Aerospace, and hopefully, Armadillo Aerospace. you can learn more about this company and the Tube Rocket by going to their website at armadilloaerospace.com. Pat Hynes works at new Mexico State University for NASA directing the new Mexico Space Grant Consortium. she can be reached at (575) 646-6414 or at pahynes@nmsu.edu.

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