# 50 Years and Counting…

On Thursday, January 31, 2008, more than 300 guests and honorees gathered at the Radisson at the Port in Cape Canaveral, Florida, to celebrate a special event for our state, the nation, and the free world. They came together to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the launching of Explorer I, this country's first artificial satellite.

During the evening, members of the original Army Ballistic Missile Agency team that was led by Dr. Wernher Von Braun reminisced and shared stories about the start of the "space age" for this country. They reminded us that Von Braun, along with Dr. Kurt Debus, Dr. Hans Gruene, Dr. Albert Seiler, and many others brought together the people and technology needed to accomplish what today seems a small step – launching a 30 pound payload into earth orbit.

The Russians had accomplished a similar feat more than three months earlier, in October of 1957, but that doesn't tell the whole story. If you press them, the ABMA team will tell you that the Army was ready two years earlier to launch payloads into orbit, but they were instructed NOT to send the 4th stage of their Jupiter C rocket into orbit *under any circumstances*.

For those too young to remember, this was a time when the world was at war– as it is today – but in a very different way. It was called a 'cold war' because although no shots were being fired, the nations of our world were lining up to compete for which ideology would run the world and how you and I would live and work in the future. I often wonder how different it would be today had it not been for the people who worked to make us free in those days. What would have happened had the Russians won the cold war instead of us?

I joined the Von Braun team 18 months after the launch of Explorer I, right out of high school in Titusville, and I had the great good fortune to spend more than 30 years at NASA. During that time I worked closely with the original Von Braun team, first with ABMA, then with NASA as employee #860. I am glad so many were able to travel here for a reunion I shall never forget. I saw my first-ever boss (how many can say that after almost 50 years?), met with people I grew up with and never expected to see again. I tried my best to express to them how much their work had influenced my life and the lives of everyone here on the Space Coast.

You see, Explorer I was much more than just a technical "first" for America. It was a major accomplishment that boosted our nation's confidence, strengthened our political clout, and eventually launched this country's mission to the moon. The same people who began work at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, ended up here at Cape Canaveral as the ABMA Missile Firing Lab that eventually became the John F. Kennedy Space Center.

Although the ABMA team understands some of the impacts of their work, I know things they don't know because I have an advantage; I went on to work in aerospace and also in education. Last summer I retired as head of a program funded by the National Science Foundation to train and certify aerospace technicians for the future of the aerospace industry in this country. Three members of the second graduating class from Brevard Community College's Aerospace Program attended the Explorer I ceremony. They call themselves the "Gemini" class, after the second series of manned orbiting spacecraft in the

1960s, and they represent the future of aerospace technicians for America. Last week, on January 25, 2008, just six days shy of the 50th anniversary of Explorer I, the Navy's aircraft carrier USS Nimitz departed San Diego for a 4 month WestPac deployment. On board were DVDs, test materials, and a certified examiner for the SpaceTEC® Certified Aerospace Technician™ Exam to allow Navy personnel to achieve formal recognition of their technical skills in the first-ever national certification program for aerospace technicians. Bon Voyage!

All this traces back to that first Explorer launch. Please join me in saying "Hats Off" to a team of tenacious engineers, scientists, technicians, secretaries, and all the others who worked at their jobs more than 50 years ago to give us the space programs, leaders, and knowledge about space fundamentals that we enjoy today. None of this could have happened without you, ABMA Team. God bless you and keep you safe.

Dr. Al Koller, former ABMA-NASA technician/engineer/program manager and NSF SpaceTEC PI