

Blueshift - October 31, 2009
Astrophysical Activity: The Building 2 Chronicle
(audio version)

[music]

Sara Mitchell: Welcome to the October 31, 2009 episode of Blueshift, brought to you from Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. This month, we put together a very special video episode about Building 2 here at Goddard. You're welcome to listen to this audio-only version... but for the full Halloween effect, we recommend you watch the video! You can find it on our website at universe.nasa.gov/blueshift

Goddard Space Flight Center was established on May 1, 1959, and is NASA's first and oldest space flight center. Named for rocketry pioneer Robert H. Goddard, the center has focused primarily on designing unmanned satellites and spacecraft for scientific research missions.

Building 2 was, as you might guess, the second building constructed at Goddard. For nearly 50 years, the building has held scientists, engineers, and other support personnel working together on a variety of NASA's space science projects. Though the science - and the styles - may have changed, Building 2 has continued to be one of the world's premier space research facilities.

With the construction of a new Exploration Sciences Building, Building 2 is facing its retirement. We wanted to give this building a fond farewell and share a bit of its history.

We first visited Bill Daniels, a technician who began his career in Building 2 over 49 years ago.

Bill Daniels: I was going to church with a man that was working over at NRL for Goddard, for NASA, before the center was open. And he knew that I had an electronics background and wanted to know if I would come to work for him. I said "Yes!". Back in that day, NASA was even more enticing than probably it is now for a lot of people. It was kind of disappointing here because there was almost nothing here when I first came. This building was here, Building 1 was here, but that was about it. I've been in Building 2 the whole time. I've been on all three floors, at all ends. When we first came into the building, the walls in the laboratories were not up - they were laying on the floor. So you could step over into the laboratories and look the full length of the building, the same way you can step out in the hall and look the full length of the building.

Sara: We also tracked down astrophysicist Tom Cline, another Building 2 resident who arrived in 1960.

Tom Cline: I interviewed as I was finishing up my PhD at MIT. I interviewed in the year 1960. And Building 2 was then under construction. Building 1 was originally the administration. It's only a small 2-story building now; it remains the same - it hasn't been

augmented. Building 2's been added on several times, but it was originally science. Building 3 was technology and data and so forth, and engineering directorate. And Goddard Center grew with the buildings being approximately numbered chronologically. Building 2 has done extremely well - Goddard's done extremely well - as NASA's premier science center. And not just because we finally got one Nobel prize, but because of the many missions, such as the current Swift mission. It's Goddard-Penn State. And the Fermi mission, Goddard was project on that, it comes out of California, Stanford and so forth. But I can go on and name spacecraft after spacecraft that were either conceived, or designed, or developed at Goddard.

Sara: Building 2 contains a wide variety of facilities to support in-house research and experimentation. Offices, laboratory spaces, fabrication facilities for building and testing instruments, a high bay to contain larger apparatus, and even an X-ray testing chamber on the top floor of the building. But there's one more place we wanted to show you...

(sounds of machinery)

Maggie Masetti: I think we're lost! I have a bad feeling about this. Where are we anyway?

Sara: I don't know. I was just looking for data storage.

Maggie: Do you have the map?

Sara: No. I didn't think we needed it so I threw it away.

Maggie: Well that's great! Looks like there's a door down there, let's go try that.

(sounds of door opening, descending stairs)

Sara: So we're down here in the basement because we wanted to show you all of the data storage down here. And you might be used to thinking about data being on the Internet, or on a hard drive somewhere, but down here it's years and years of data stored on tapes. This room is just absolutely full of data, just lots of treasures here to find.

Maggie: Sara, I found some more of those data ... tapes ...

(sound of tape unravelling)

Maggie: I'm gonna put that back... where I found it... There's some square ones down here if you want to get some footage this way...

Sara: Oh, OK. Hold on a second, I want to get some of this stuff over here... yeah... lots more tapes... there are some boxes of data from the 1970s... what'd you find over here? Maggie?

(no response from Maggie)

Sara: Maggie? This isn't funny! Maggie?!

(sounds of Sara running)

Sara: Maggie?!

(sound of Sara rattling door, running)

Sara: Maggie?!

(more running)

Sara: Maggie?!

(loud sounds of machinery starting up, Sara sounding panicked)

Sara: (gasp)!

Eric Winter: Sara and Maggie disappeared during filming, and were never seen again. This disturbing footage was recovered in the old building's Dead End Lounge, and reflects their final terrifying moments.

To learn more about the history of Building 2, and NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, visit the Blueshift website, at universe.nasa.gov/blueshift, or follow us on Twitter, where we're NASABlueshift.

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