



IMPORTANT PUBLIC NOTICE

Woods Park, Donut Bay Closed Due to Suspected Avian Influenza

See A4

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Stalcup Plays Key Role in NASA's Artemis II Moon Mission

By Laura Lombardi

Wellington High School 2006 graduate Erik Stalcup was waiting this week to learn whether he would be traveling to Florida for the Artemis II launch when word came early Tuesday morning: the mission would be delayed. NASA concluded a wet dress rehearsal for the test flight and, after encountering several challenges, made the decision to conduct a second rehearsal, pushing the launch to the next available window in March.

While the timeline has shifted, Stalcup's role in the historic mission



remains the same. When Artemis II does lift off, he will travel to NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida to witness the launch. Once the rocket successfully reaches orbit, he will head to NASA's Johnson Space

Center in Houston, where he will spend the next 10 days monitoring the astronauts' journey from inside Mission Control.

As the European Service Module Passive Thermal Control Systems Subsystem Manager from NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Stalcup works on Orion spacecraft thermal systems, including insulation blankets, surface coatings and more than 600 heaters. He will support the Artemis II mission from the Mission Control Complex's new Orion Mission Evaluation Room (MER). There, he and dozens of engineers will work rotating shifts around the clock, collecting data and closely monitoring any anomalies that could impact the crew.

"It's a fast-paced environment with all of the experts in one room," said Stalcup. "It's stressful, but fun."

Artemis II will carry four astronauts—Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen—around the Moon and back aboard the Orion spacecraft.



WHS alumnus Erik Stalcup (Right) will monitor the Artemis II mission from the Orion Mission Evaluation Room inside the Mission Control Center at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. Photo by James Blair - NASA - JSC



Stalcup watched as the Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft were rolled onto the Launch Pad at Kennedy Space Center.



The mission represents a major milestone, laying the groundwork for future lunar surface missions and eventual human exploration of Mars.

"I think the most exciting part of this mission is that it's the first time humans have traveled beyond low Earth orbit in more than 50 years," Stalcup said.

On January 17, Stalcup was onsite at Kennedy Space Center as the Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft were rolled from the Vehicle Assembly Building to Launch Pad 39B. The 12-hour journey marked a significant step toward launch.

"The first wet dress rehearsal started last Saturday," Stalcup explained. "The pre-launch test simulates the entire countdown process,

Local Viewing Party Planned for Artemis II Launch

Depending on the launch date, the Wellington Regent Theatre will host a public Artemis II viewing party along-side LaunchLearning Fellowship winner and Wellington Middle School science teacher Aubrey Roths.

Through the fellowship, Roths has worked with astronauts and space-industry leaders, bringing innovative STEM experiences into local classrooms. She also participated in Teachers in Space, serving in a simulated mission control and low Earth orbit environment.

stopping just before engine ignition."

During the rehearsal, engineers began loading the rocket with more than 700,000 gallons of cryogenic propellant, including liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen. Fueling operations were paused after a leak was detected, underscoring the importance of the test in finalizing a safe launch date.

"There are a lot of things that have to line up for the launch to proceed," said Stalcup. "Weather plays a

big role, especially cloud cover and wind speed."

NASA will formally set the launch date following a flight readiness review, during which data from the wet dress rehearsals will be analyzed. With March now identified as the next potential launch window, teams will work to resolve any outstanding issues before setting an official target date, ensuring crew safety remains the top priority.

SEE STALCUP A6

Castaneda Takes the Stage at Home Show



By Laura Lombardi

Last weekend, local chef Mike Castaneda was invited by the Wichita Area Builders Association (WABA) to host a cooking demonstration on the Celebrity Cooking Stage at the 72nd Annual WABA Home Show, held at Century II in Wichita.

This marked the first year for the cooking stage, which was located in the

Marketplace Area and sponsored by Midwest Cabinetry & Design, Keystone Solid Surfaces, and Metro Appliances. During the demonstration, Castaneda shared a pair of quick, approachable recipes while showcasing practical cooking techniques for the audience.

"I made two different recipes, butter chicken and banana parfait," Castaneda said. "They both contained five ingredients and could be made in under 15 minutes."

The Marketplace Area also featured a variety of local artisans offering unique gifts and gourmet goods.

"It was amazing," Castaneda said. "We had some great crowds, and in the 70-plus years of doing this show, they've never had a chef. I was the first, and that meant a lot."

Mike Castaneda's Butter Chicken

Ingredients

- 1/2 stick butter
- 2 tablespoons Sam's Butter
- Chicken seasoning
- 2 pounds boneless chicken thighs, diced
- 1/3 cup tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup heavy cream

Directions

Heat a pan over medium-high heat and melt the butter. Once melted, add the butter chicken seasoning and stir until fragrant. Add the diced chicken thighs and cook until they begin to brown. Stir in the tomato sauce until fully incorporated. Reduce heat to medium-low and add the heavy cream. Stir well and allow the sauce to simmer for 1-2 minutes, or until slightly thickened. Serve with white rice and naan bread.



2026 Homecoming Duke Candidates

The Wellington High School Student Council has announced the Duke candidates for the 2026 Winter Homecoming. Congratulations to Jason Golden, Cooper Hatfield, Trevan Hernandez, Lex Goff, and Luke Wylie.

The Crusaders will celebrate Winter Homecoming on February 20, 2026.

Kids & Connections

Eisenhower Students Shake & Bake to Celebrate Kansas
A3

Sports

Dynamic Dukes Win Their Big Game,
A5

