



Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald

Tahir Merali tries out the cockpit of an F-86 Sabre while Anne Breaks steps up on the wing at the Aero Space Museum. Merali was chosen to attend a three-week space school at NASA in Houston. Breaks went last year.

Space 101 the next frontier

Calgary teen invited to NASA

LAUREN MACGILLIVRAY
CALGARY HERALD

With just seven active astronauts from Canada, Tahir Merali is a ray of hope to expand the stock.

At just 16, the Calgarian has dedicated himself to becoming an astronaut, and being accepted to NASA's International Space School for hand-picked high school students is a bona fide start.

"You have to have a solid foundation if you want to advance," says Merali. "My passion is to go into space, and this is one step to help me achieve my goal."

Merali said he has wanted to become an astronaut since age five, when he visited the Kennedy Space Center in Florida with his parents.

Breaks said the experience was grounding, as she realized what a struggle it is to become an astronaut.

However, she said she won't give up. Breaks has been fascinated looking at the stars since she was two years old.

Tom Kelly, education and public programming officer for the Aero Space Museum Association, said it's always a joy to watch the students who are chosen to experience NASA.

"It makes their dreams come alive and they finally see they're working towards their goal."

Merali's acceptance to the program was announced Thursday at the mu-

seum, in celebration of International Space Day — a project aimed at promoting science and math education for youth from kindergarten to Grade 12.

At the Calgary Science Centre, about 200 students from five elementary schools chatted via satellite Thursday with Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, currently working for NASA in Russia.

Weaved through his tales of life as an astronaut, one message given by Hadfield was clear: "What you do with your life is up to you."

"These kids could be the astronauts who go to Mars," said Alan Dyer, an astronomer at the science centre.

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