

THE RIGHT

STUFF



North Allegheny grad Warren ‘Woody’ Hoburg selected to join NASA’s newest astronaut class.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

As a private pilot with extensive search-and-rescue experience, North Allegheny native Warren “Woody” Hoburg has flown on plenty of perilous missions.

Now he is training for an entirely new frontier—space.

A 2004 graduate of North Allegheny High School, Hoburg is one of 12 astronaut candidates chosen for NASA’s newest astronaut class. The 2017 class, which includes seven men and five women, were selected from 18,300 applicants, the largest pool of applicants in the history of NASA.

Hoburg, an assistant professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT, reported to Houston in August and will spend the next two years training for space flight. He says that the idea of becoming an astronaut was always in the back of his mind, but other interests prevailed—at first.

“If you had asked me when I was younger if I would like to be an astronaut, I would have said, ‘Someday,’” explains Hoburg, speaking by phone from Houston. “I never had my heart set on it, because I had so many other interests and because the odds are so small.”

Still, his journey to space flight began when he was just a teenager, building model rockets in his family’s kitchen. He credits both family and the school district with encouraging his drive.

“I was incredibly lucky to grow up with a supportive family, and with parents who

encouraged me to follow my passions,” he says. “And North Allegheny is an incredibly strong public school system. I received a great education there.”

Following high school, Hoburg earned a bachelor’s degree in aeronautics and astronautics from MIT. He then went on to earn his doctorate in electrical engineering and computer science from the University of California, Berkeley. As a professor at MIT, his research focuses on efficient methods for the design of engineering systems. He’s a two-time recipient of the AIAA Aeronautics and Astronautics Teaching Award, in recognition of outstanding teaching at MIT, and from 2009 to 2013, he was a National Science Foundation graduate research fellow.

Prior to MIT, Hoburg worked for Boeing Commercial Airplanes Product Development on software for composite manufacturing processes. From 2010 to 2013, he was a member of the Yosemite Search and Rescue, and an operations leader for the Bay Area Mountain Rescue Unit.

NASA released a call for applicants at the end of 2015 to select its first new class since 2013. As expected, the application process is substantial, requiring a lengthy

paper application, medical screenings and in-person interviews. Hoburg describes the process as a “short burst of intense activity following by a good amount of waiting.” He recalls the day he received the final call that he’d been selected as “wild.”

“I received a heads-up that the calls would be coming that day,” he explains. “So when the phone rang, and it was the head of the selection board telling me to come down to Johnson [Space Center], it was heart-stopping.”

Hoburg and his classmates, including two Canadian candidates, will spend the next two years training at Johnson Space Center, where they’ll be required to take classes, complete International Space Station systems training, robotic skills training, Russian language training and aircraft flight readiness training. They’re also required to complete military water survival training and become SCUBA certified. Following successful completion of the program, the candidates will be assigned technical duties in the Astronaut Office while they await flight assignments.

“It’s going to be an amazing experience,” says Hoburg. “I’m looking forward to the broader experience I’ll be sharing with the rest of the class.” ■



NASA’s 2017 astronaut candidates take a group photo at Ellington Field near Johnson Space Center. Pictured are, front row, left to right, Zena Cardman, Jasmin Moghbeli, Robb Kulin, Jessica Watkins, Loral O’Hara; back row, left to right, Jonny Kim, Frank Rubio, Matthew Dominick, Warren Hoburg, Kayla Barron, Bob Hines, and Raja Chari.



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