

Cheeseburgers *in* Outer Space

It is funny how the human mind can make connections between memories, concepts, thoughts, and moments in time. With that said, I pose the question: What could Jimmy Buffet, teacher pension reform, NASA, and the Hall of Fame have in common? Not much, unless you were doing a mind meld (via Spock of Star Trek fame) with me in August 2013.

One warm summer evening, following an afternoon of welcoming new teachers to Barrington 220, I sat at home looking for a good movie to enjoy on Netflix. I wasn't in the mood for anything too serious or too thought-provoking, just something with a little humor to entertain. I locked onto "Space Cowboys," which was first released in 2000. If you have not seen the film, it is about four former astronauts who did not get to take a mission into outer space when monkeys replaced them in the late 1950s. As the movie opens, they have all moved on with their lives and are retired in different settings. Veteran actors Clint Eastwood, James Garner, Tommy

Lee Jones, and Donald Sutherland play the key characters.

As the story unfolds in the modern day, NASA has an issue with an old satellite and its malfunctioning navigation system, which poses the potential danger of crashing uncontrollably into Earth. In the movie, no one currently at NASA has any knowledge of how this navigation system works except the four retired astronauts who developed it more than 40 years earlier. NASA needs their expertise, which they only agree to provide if the space agency will send them as a team into space to repair the satellite. It is a fun, clean, and simple movie with a few good laughs.

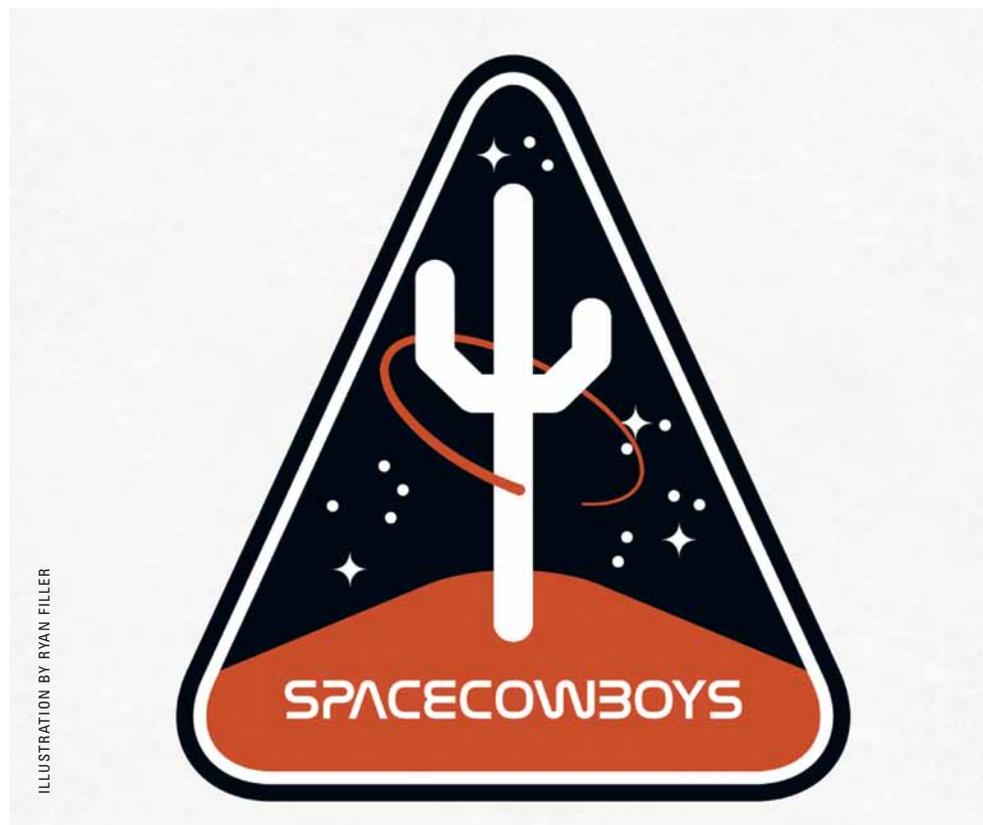
Two days after watching the film, I attended a friend's annual Jimmy Buffett party. He and his wife are big Buffett fans, and it is always nice to enjoy a "Cheeseburger in Paradise" (or in this case Crystal Lake) while listening to Buffett's greatest recorded hits along with other aging beach bums.

As I listened to NPR on the radio en route to the party, I heard a raging debate over the Illinois pension controversy. With the movie "Space Cowboys" still lingering in my mind, and the pension dispute mixed in for good measure, I entered the Buffett bash and saw three retired high school physics teachers wearing tropical shirts and eating cheeseburgers (both of which are entirely appropriate at a Parrothead party).

To be clear, these were not just any three retired physics teachers. These were once THE premier physics teachers in the entire Chicago region, maybe even the United States. Scott Beutilich, Jim Hicks, and Chris Chiaverina all had amazing careers in education, with more than 100 combined years in the classroom. Honing their science to an art form, they were known on state and national levels as the best in their field. If there was a Hall of Fame for Physics Teachers, these guys would be Hank Aaron, Ty Cobb, and Babe Ruth.

Beutilich spent most of his career teaching Advanced Placement (AP) Physics at Crystal Lake South High School, and still works with the College Board in designing AP exams. Hicks and Chiaverina both taught physics at Barrington High School, where they were leaders in their subject area and developed amazing curricula. Hicks retired from BHS, while Chiaverina spent the latter part of his career teaching at New Trier High School.

With Buffett's "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes" blowing in the background, the three of them told me of their own lifestyle changes: trips to Florida in the winter, numerous golf games, and endless hours of playing with grandchildren. That's when my mind sifted the sand of all these ideas to suggest a shell of an idea: the three of them should return to the classroom to



become Barrington 220's version of the Space Cowboys, providing professional development and coaching to younger elementary and middle school teachers.

At first, they probably thought I had been "wasting away again in Margaritaville," but as the idea came together, all three were intrigued. The hook for them was that this concept would allow them one more opportunity to touch the lives of students, to change a child's education by sparking an interest in science. By returning to the classroom, they could help develop and improve the skills of new teachers, who, in turn, would inspire the next generation.

THANKS TO THESE INTERSTELLAR ALL-STARS, A NEW ERA OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ARE BENEFITING FROM REVITALIZED TALENTS AND RESOURCES.

Enter the Barrington 220 Educational Foundation, which agreed to sponsor the relaunch of these legendary instructors. Partnering with some wonderful curriculum leaders in Barrington 220, such as Becky Gill-Schultz, Kelly Hansen, and Linda Klobucher, led to the lift-off of Barrington 220's own Space Cowboys. Their climb back into the instructional cockpit even led to a movie short produced by BHS TV students that can be seen at youtube.com/barrington220 (see link below).

Thanks to these interstellar all-stars, a new era of teachers and students are benefiting from revitalized talents and resources. The planets are aligned as partnerships have produced a modern-day teaching version of a one-time major motion picture. It may be "Five O'Clock Somewhere," but in Barrington 220 it isn't quitting time; its time for learning again with three Space Cowboys named Beutilich, Hicks, and Chiaverina. And it all began with a cheeseburger in paradise. U

Check out BHS-TV's video on the Space Cowboy program here!

<http://youtu.be/PzP2-shWZFo>



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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