Linking the Tom P. Stafford Air and Space Museum to the Science and Math Association of Rural Teacher’s Community Of Practice (SMART-COP)

For the past four years the Oklahoma Rural Math and Science Partnership (OK-RMSP) has focused three intense weeks in the summer and six weekend sessions during the school year to increasing the content knowledge of rural Western Oklahoma Math and Science Teachers (Campbell, Moseley 2006). During the transition from the 2006 OK-RMSP the name has changed to SMART (Science Math Association of Rural Teachers). This makes the community of practice to support that organization the SMART-COP. This community of practice is rich in supplementary material to support the local Science and Math Teachers. In 2004 these teachers were linked together for the first time using a virtual community. This virtual community originally provided by the staff of Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) provides a valuable resource for rural Western Oklahoma teachers.

However it was missing anything to do with space and space exploration. This is such a broad field that it is hard to pin down a starting point. During a day long session held for teachers on the History of Aviation at the Tom P. Stafford Air and Space Museum the idea evolved that a smooth transition for the SMART to include space would be to start with a real trip to the museum or at least a virtual tour of the museum contents. Everybody loves the hometown hero, especially small towns like Weatherford, Oklahoma, home of the astronaut that flew higher and faster than anyone else, Lieutenant General Tom P. Stafford. Stafford and Andrew Chaikin were the hosts and moderators for the “History of Aviation” tour through the Stafford Museum. Everyone that attended that day came to the conclusion that they had rubbed shoulders with greatness in the man and Oklahoma Legend Tom Stafford. We all came away from that day with a burning desire to know more about aviation and more focused on space travel. It is this desire that spawned this project. Most the attendees bought General Stafford’s Book “We Have Capture” and Andrew Chaikin book “A Man on the Moon: Voyage of the Apollo Astronauts”. Chaikin book eventually became the television mini-series “From the Earth to the Moon” Because of the vastness of information of the space program it was decided to use the museum contents as a springboard to introduce space into the SMART Community of Practice.