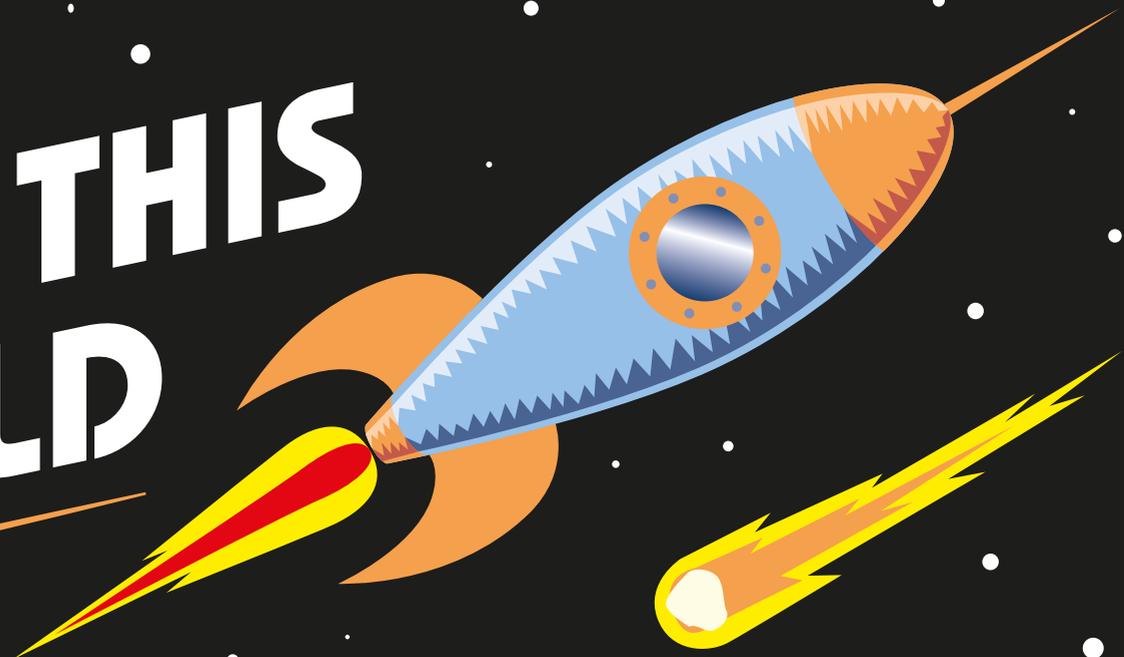


NASA SITE IS OUT OF THIS WORLD



A friend and I had just finished kayaking around the lake on a recent late summer evening. As the last colors from the setting sun bled from the sky in the west, a waxing gibbous moon rose in the east. Saturn and Jupiter were shining brightly just above it on the right.

Inspired by the celestial show, our conversation turned to sky watchers of the distant past. Unencumbered by television, computers or electric lights, people spent more time looking at the night sky. And their view was much more vivid since they didn't have to contend with light pollution.

A few of these star gazers were observant and smart enough that they were able to solve some of the secrets of space by tracking the movement of heavenly bodies. They discovered that they could chart the sea-



**KEVIN
O'NEILL**
InSites

sons and navigate vast distances by noting the positions of the lights in the sky. Our knowledge of space, and our time tracking and navigational technology, have improved dramatically over the years. We now carry powerful computers in our pockets that can tell us precisely where and when we are, anywhere in the world, with the flick of a finger. But tracking time and location are still based on the planetary ballet and spaced-based technology. And the night sky is still a source of fascination.

Solarsystem.nasa.gov is a NASA website that takes viewers on a wonderful journey through our solar system and the galaxy beyond it. The site is full of stunning, interactive visuals of the planets, moons, asteroids and other objects whizzing around in space. It is packed with the latest knowledge science has to offer about outer space. It also has many useful tips on how to enjoy the sky at night.

The home page features a screen-filling slide show of animations and videos of Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Earth and the moon. Links with each image invite you to explore the subjects in

greater detail. There's history, data, photos, information on exploratory missions and more. You can rotate the images to explore them from any angle, and landmarks are tagged with links to more information.

Scrolling down the home page reveals more features. The Roundup is a collection of 10 articles covering "the latest from around your galactic neighborhood." Below that is a featured article, currently about a supernova spotted in 2015. Next is a video with sky watching tips for September. At the bottom of the home page are pictures of the eight planets in our solar system (sorry Pluto), and our moon, that act as links to their own pages.

Access to the rest of the site is provided by links across the top. An animated icon of the solar system takes you to an interactive diagram that shows the real-time positions of the planets and other major objects. You can zoom in and out, and clicking on an object calls up information about it. Other links cover the solar system, including beyond Neptune's orbit, the planets, all the known moons, asteroids, comets and more.

This site is beautifully designed with great art, good typography, logical navigation and interesting content. However, I was surprised to find numerous grammatical errors on the site. I guess I expected more attention to detail from rocket scientists.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites with him at koneill@times-shamrock.com.