

Jewish astronaut settles in aboard Mir

SPACE CENTER, Houston (AP) — He just started his four-month stay aboard Mir and already he has a holiday coming up: Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year.

Astronaut David Wolf's mother doubts her son — the first Jewish American to live on the Russian space station — will be able to take time off to observe Rosh Hashana this week or the rest of the Jewish High Holy Days.

But "maybe he'll get a vision of the High Holidays closer to heaven than we will," said Martha Katz of the Jewish Community Center of Indianapolis, Wolf's boyhood hangout. "It's a lovely thought, isn't it?"

And Wolf did take up a mezuzah, a rolled piece of parchment in a case that traditionally is attached to the doorpost of a new home.

Mir will be Wolf's home until late January. He moved in Sunday — becoming the sixth American to go aboard the station — and spent Monday getting to know the place and his two new Russian roommates.

"I doubt really if they're going to give him time off for a holiday. I really doubt that, and he wouldn't even consider asking," said his mother, Dottie Wolf. "He will just say 'Happy New Year' to the Rus-

sians, in Russian, and maybe he will teach them something about our New Year."

With all the last-minute uncertainty over her son's launch to Mir and questions about his safety, Wolf said she forgot to ask whether he packed the traditional honey and apples to celebrate the New Year. (He didn't, says NASA.) She was more interested in whether he remembered to take his screwdriver for the inevitable space station repairs. (He did.)

When he flew on space shuttle Columbia in 1993, Wolf took up a Torah pointer and a shofar, the ram's horn that is blown to announce the new year, for Indianapolis' Beth-El Zedeck Temple, where he had his bar mitzvah 28 years ago.

This time, the temple gave him a mezuzah, which he will return early next year and affix to a new educational wing.

"Since Mir going to be David's home, we thought it would be appropriate," said Rabbi Sandy Sasso.

She and her rabbi husband, Dennis, offered a special prayer for Wolf during a Sabbath service attended by the astronaut's parents and grandmother on Sept. 20, five days before he left for Mir aboard space shuttle Atlantis.

The opening verse of the Shema, the prayer that is tucked inside the mezuzah, is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" — an especially fitting line considering how borders and divisions are invisible from space, the rabbi said.

Wolf also took up a mezuzah for the Jewish nursing home in Indianapolis where his aunt lives.

His sister, Anne Berggren, said he probably won't unpack the two mezuzot. But he will open her Hanukkah gift after it arrives on a Russian supply ship in October — a menorah and gelt, or holiday candy that looks like coins.

"People don't realize when they're up there, they're just not putting out fires, so to speak, that they have lives back on Earth and it's important that they are able to observe certain holidays," Berggren said.

Wolf, 41, an unmarried doctor and engineer, certainly will think about Rosh Hashana, which begins at sundown Wednesday night, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the following week, even if he can't observe them properly, his mother said. On his way to the launch pad last Thursday, he shouted: "Happy New Year, folks!"

(Of course, there's a sunrise and

sunset every 90 minutes in orbit, one of the many aspects of space-flight that could raise questions of Talmudic complexity for an observant Jew. Then again, observant Jews aren't supposed to be riding in vehicles on the High Holy Days or the Sabbath.)

Wolf spent Monday with his Mir predecessor, NASA astronaut Michael Foale, whose 4 1/2-month mission included a devastating collision and frequent computer crashes and accompanying power outages.

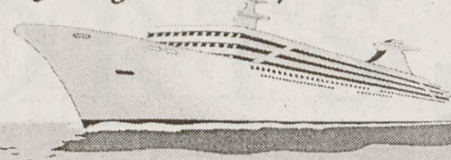
The two will work side by side until the hatches between the docked Atlantis and Mir are closed Thursday, so Wolf can get the inside story on life aboard the cluttered, ruptured station. Atlantis is scheduled to pull away with Foale on Friday, after six days of linked flight, and return to Earth on Sunday.

Since arriving on Mir, Wolf has expressed again his confidence in the safety of the 11 1/2-year-old space station and the importance of his research up there.

Wolf said her son would not have gone — and NASA would not have sent him — if Mir were as dangerous as some members of Congress and others say.

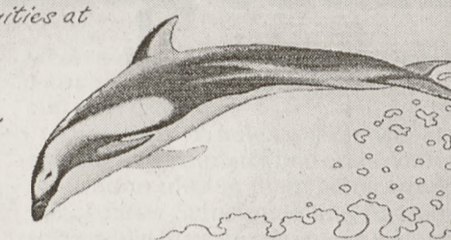
Still, as a mother, she worries: "He's going to be gone so long."

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Health officials extend ban due to Red Tide

HARLINGEN, Texas (AP) — State health officials Monday extended a ban of clam, mussel and oyster harvesting to the lower Texas coast in the wake of a red tide outbreak that has killed millions of fish in past weeks.

Meanwhile, wildlife officials tested water samples and flew over the coastline to try to determine where the algae might spread next.

"No one has a clue as to what's going to happen. No one can even second-guess this thing," said Larry McEachron, science director for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Coastal Fisheries Division.

Red tide is a bloom of microscopic algae that attacks the nervous systems of fish and creates a reddish tint in seawater. Its toxins can kill many fish species, but only infected clams, mussels and oysters are unsafe for human consumption, state health officials said.

"Clams, mussels and oysters concentrate the

toxin. When people consume those, the toxin can make them ill," said Kirk Wiles, assistant director of the Division of Seafood Safety at the Texas Department of Health.

Systems include nausea, dizziness, tingling sensations in the extremities and dilated pupils. Illness can last several days but is not usually fatal, Wiles said. Airborne toxins also can cause nose, throat and eye irritations.

Red tide was spotted several weeks ago off the coast of Port O'Connor, then moved south in the Gulf of Mexico to San Jose Island, where 2 1/2 million fish washed ashore last week.

Although it has since dissipated in those areas, the red tide has spread to the lower coast, where thousands more fish were found dead over the weekend from the south end of Padre Island National Seashore to South Padre Island.

In response to the movement, state health officials extended a ban on clam, mussel and oys-

ter harvesting from the upper coast down to South Padre Island, Wiles said. Only Galveston Bay is excluded.

Although commercial oyster harvesting does not start until Nov. 1, Wiles said recreational fishermen may be catching infected fish.

"We are warning people not to consume clams, mussels and oysters from any of those waters," he said. "This includes recreational harvesters or people who eat brown edible mussels off the jetties from Port Aransas south to South Padre Island."

If the red tide persists and spreads into the Texas bay system, health officials may be forced to suspend commercial oyster harvesting as well, Wiles said.

"It'll depend on the circumstances we see over the next several weeks," Wiles said. "We'll be monitoring how long the red tide stays and where it goes."

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