

INTRODUCING SHARESPACE

By **Buzz Aldrin**

In these heady early days of space tourism, a note of bracing realism is in order. Even the rosier forecasts predict that it will be years before the average ticket price for a ride into space drops below \$50,000. While this may not be a forbidding sum to the more than one million millionaires who can be found in the United States alone, it is indeed prohibitive for the vast majority of ordinary citizens, both in the United States and abroad. Is space tourism, despite its promise of space-for-all, destined in the near term to merely replace a well-trained NASA elite with a well-heeled economic elite?

Not necessarily. There exists a classic mechanism for ensuring that a high-priced asset is distributed in an egalitarian manner—the lottery. The lottery approach is at the heart of a concept that for self-evident reasons I have termed “ShareSpace.” The purpose of ShareSpace is to use the lottery approach to strengthen and accelerate the growth of commercial space, and at the same time create a highly participatory “citizens” space program. The *raison d’être* of ShareSpace is the furtherance of human opportunities and activities in space.

The ShareSpace concept is to be incorporated—quite literally—in corporate organizational form. We are currently weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various organizational options. The particular form we ultimately choose will have an effect on the precise mechanisms by which ShareSpace will operate. Nevertheless, the fundamental structure and properties of ShareSpace—the blueprint upon which the ultimate form will be based—is now emerging with sufficient clarity to be introduced here in summary fashion.

Citizen Participation

Members of the American public, and ideally citizens worldwide, will be eligible to participate in ShareSpace. Irrespective of whether these citizen participants are ultimately construed as lottery players purchasing tickets or as corporate shareholders purchasing shares, the upshot will be the same: For a nominal price, e.g., \$10, ordinary citizens will gain access to a lottery in which the prizes will be a range of space-tourism experiences. Prizes that could be offered today include visits to space launches, tours of space-related scientific facilities, and high-altitude zero-gravity flight experiences. Prizes that could be offered in the relatively near future include suborbital ballistic flights above the atmosphere, orbital flights, and eventually adventure trips to luxury orbital hotels. In the

very long term, there is no inherent reason why prizes could not include low-altitude cyclor circumnavigation of the Moon, or even extended cyclor journeys to Mars.

Will enough ordinary citizens want to enter such space-prize lotteries? The evidence certainly suggests a recent groundswell in public interest in space exploration. The movie *Apollo 13* was tremendously successful. The NASA website for the Mars Pathfinder received an astonishing 115 million hits in a single day. Shortly after the Pathfinder triumph, a *New York Times* article commented that the American public was being roused from its apathy by an “emerging phase of the American space program,” one “characterized by new promise and peril.” Nor is the current interest in space confined to a purely passive spectator mode. The combined attendance of the National Air and Space Museum, Cape Kennedy, Johnson Space Center, and Space Camp is 13.9 million visitors a year, which exceeds the total combined annual visitation to both Universal Studios.

Moreover, the basic lottery concept, in incarnations ranging from small-scale church raffles to multi-million-dollar prize sweepstakes, is part of the fabric of modern culture. It is estimated that Americans alone spend more than \$30 billion on lotteries each year. Studies have shown that a solid majority of Americans approve of legalized gaming, believe its benefits outweigh its drawbacks, and would prefer lotteries to higher taxes. Perhaps more to the point, a majority of Americans are more likely to enter lotteries if the proceeds are earmarked for special fund purposes with an element of social idealism. Lotteries are as American as apple pie and space exploration, and as with these phenomena there is no reason to think their appeal does not extend to other cultures as well.

Tour-Company Participation

Companies in the space tourism business that choose to participate will enter into contractual arrangements which specify that a percentage of their products or services will be donated to ShareSpace. These contributions will serve as the ShareSpace prizes. In fact, this is already proving to be a viable concept: Several of the companies offering suborbital rides into space have expressed interest in donating perhaps 5% of their seats to ShareSpace. Any tour-company product or service, ranging from a visit to a purely terrestrial perhaps 5%

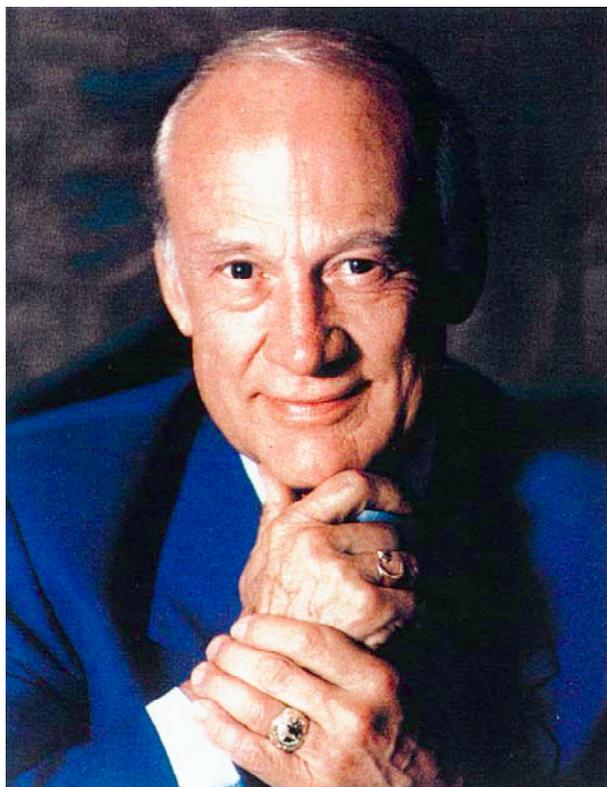
of their seats to space facility to the eventual stay in an orbiting space hotel, would qualify for donation as a ShareSpace prize. (Such donor-companies, of course, would continue to rely on full-price customers for the bulk of their business.)

The willingness of tour companies to make such generous donations stems from their awareness of what they stand to gain. Of course, such companies could attempt to democratize their passenger base independently by holding their own individual lotteries, but this would not bring the range of benefits that ShareSpace will bring. ShareSpace will offer participating tour companies inclusion in its high-visibility, wide-ranging marketing and public relations efforts in various media. Benefits will include access to the database of ShareSpace members, and prominent booth space at ShareSpace fairs and tours. ShareSpace will thus function as a marketing cooperative, providing its member companies with the efficiencies that result from a pooling of effort.

The ShareSpace Organizational Role: Intermediary, and More

ShareSpace will serve two basic intermediary roles. First, by developing and overseeing the basic lottery mechanism, ShareSpace will serve as an intermediary between tour companies on the one hand, and ordinary citizens on the other, who would love to become space tourists if only they had the financial wherewithal. Second, ShareSpace will intermediate among the diverse elements within the space tourism community by serving as an umbrella organization that allows the diverse elements to cooperate to advance their common marketing and promotional interests.

Over and above these intermediary roles, ShareSpace intends to use the lottery mechanism to build up an endowment fund to be used for wide-ranging support of private space travel. A high percentage of the endowment funds will go to universities, associations, or corporations that are doing critical research and development work focused on lowering space-access costs and creating a private space tourism industry. For instance, grants could support such entities as the Space Studies Institute, the International Space University, the X PRIZE Foundation, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and the Space Transport-



tation Association's new Space Travel and Tourism Division. Funds would also support the public educational efforts of such groups as the National Space Society, the United States Space Foundation, the Space Frontier Foundation, the Space Tourism Society, and NASA Space Camps and Visitor Centers. Finally, funds could go to support the primary players in the private space effort—the up and coming space launch companies and space tourism companies.

From Fictional Origins, Real-World Hopes

The basic ShareSpace idea was conceived in fictional form, in my 1996 book, *Encounter With Tiber*. The character Sig

Jarlsbourg introduces the fictional version as follows: "If you want that better world, we need to see space tourism take off right away, and it can't be as a plaything of a tiny group of super-rich people. It's got to have broad-based public support and enthusiasm right from the start. And for that, ladies and gentlemen, I propose—ShareSpace Global."

The ShareSpace concept has completed its fictional gestation period and emerged into the real world. Though still in its infancy, the preliminary signs are encouraging. As noted earlier, some space tourism companies have already shown genuine interest in the idea of donating seats on their flights and thereby diversifying their passenger base. The recently released joint study of space tourism conducted by NASA and the Space Transportation Association lends indirect support by noting the potential of lottery and auction mechanisms. In mid-May, I will be giving a major presentation of ShareSpace to a conference of lottery executives in Washington, DC.

That a concept still essentially in its infancy is moving this rapidly toward a significant debut bodes well for its ability to flourish and grow in the current environment. If ShareSpace thrives as we hope it will, so will the fortunes of a number of ordinary citizens in the fairly near future. For these lucky ones, purchasing lottery tickets for less than the price of a tank of gasoline will bring a return on investment that is out of this world. ★

Buzz Aldrin chairs the NSS Board of Directors. Aldrin was the lunar module pilot for the first human landing on the Moon. He would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ron Jones, John Spencer, and David Gump to the ShareSpace concept.