

Chugiak grad aims high – literally

Meyen's work ethic in space technology earns him coveted spot at MIT

BY NINA RAYBURN

[For the Star](#)



As a child, Forrest Meyen's curiosity led him to mountaintops surrounding his Eagle River home. Now the 21-year-old student aspires to reach outer space.

A senior majoring in biological and mechanical engineering at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Meyen received the rare opportunity to study space exploration when attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Summer Research Program last year. While developing an improved space suit, Meyen trained life-size robots and honed his own research skills in the process.

2007 Chugiak High valedictorian Forrest Meyen has earned a spot at the Man Vehicle Laboratory at MIT for his work with improving space suits and developing technology for space travel.

Photo courtesy Forrest Meyen

"I was always seeing new things to improve and explore in the data," Meyen said. "Sometimes you just have to limit yourself to those deadlines and know that it's never going to be perfect."

His persistence caught the attention of Dava Newman, professor of aeronautics, astronautics and engineering systems at MIT and Meyen's research mentor at the program.

"I really admired Forrest's work ethic, and he's not afraid to get his hands dirty by experimenting," Newman said. "It's great that he's been able to learn both innovative and academic skills, and have a positive attitude on top of all that. He's very talented."

Newman awarded Meyen with an extremely competitive position to return to the Man Vehicle Laboratory at MIT in the fall. Meyen also received full tuition and stipends to complete his master's degree. Newman agrees that the impressive opportunity sets him on the right path toward becoming an astronaut.

"Not only will he learn how to control devices and enhance locomotion on Mars, but also quite a bit about physiology and how the human body performs," Newman said. "This is the perfect next step for him."

Meyen attributes such success in part to his experiences as former president of the University of Missouri's hydrogen car team, Tigergen. Attending class all day and then constructing the car late into the night taught him the meaning of dedication.

"I've worked hard my whole life, so it doesn't faze me coming to a competitive environment," Meyen said. "In lab, you always want to learn as much as you can and see what everyone else is exploring."

It's a work ethic he carried throughout high school, too. Meyen was the 2007 Chugiak High valedictorian and known for his wide-open personality. He participated on the cross-country running and skiing teams, serving as a captain for both sports in his junior and senior years.

He also was a part of the Science Olympiad team and a member of the school's choir. Outside of school, he was active in the Boy Scouts, earning the rank of Eagle Scout during his sophomore year.

So, designing a car from scratch for national competitive races became yet another challenge for him to learn to appreciate.

"The team learned that having the only hydrogen car in our division comes with a lot of high stress because it's so complex," Meyen said. "So many parts go into making our car but that's great because it allows all kinds of majors to participate."

The car also allows Meyen to share this passion with students in elementary and middle schools across mid-Missouri by raising interest in engineering.

"Kids get so excited when they see an actual car I sat in a laboratory and built," Meyen said. "But they can also see how college allows you to lead a team, make important decisions and teach yourself. To be able to learn about the world around you is so important and I'm lucky to have gained these skills."

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