



20-page special edition

EXTRA

Saturday, February 1, 2003

Columbia lost

Shuttle explodes during re-entry over Texas



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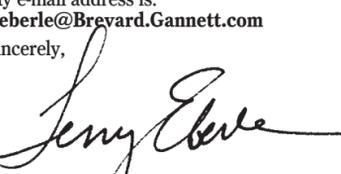
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AP photos
Contrails from what appears to be shuttle Columbia streak across the sky Saturday over Texas in this image from television. Columbia apparently disintegrated in flames over Texas minutes before it was to land Saturday at Cape Canaveral. The video showed what appeared to be falling debris, as NASA declared an emergency and warned residents to beware of fallen objects.

To our readers:

It is a tragic and sad day for the Space Coast. Every person at *Florida Today* is working to provide the most complete and accurate information into this disaster. We will be on the story today and in the days and months ahead. Beyond this Extra edition, we will be coming back with a second edition this evening. Sunday's newspaper will provide extensive and in-depth coverage about what happened and what it could mean to the space program. We will not speculate or run rumors. Our mission is to verify information and cut through the layers of red tape to give you the most complete and honest account of what happened and why it happened. As the story of this tragedy unveils, I invite you to let me know how we are doing. This is not a *Florida Today* story, it is our community's story. My e-mail address is: Teberle@Brevard.Gannett.com Sincerely,  Terry Eberle, Executive Editor

7 astronauts die in fiery descent

By Chris Kridler and John Kelly
FLORIDA TODAY
CAPE CANAVERAL — Space shuttle Columbia exploded over Central Texas this morning on its way to Kennedy Space Center, apparently killing all seven astronauts aboard. The shuttle reentry had gone well in favorable weather before the explosion. The cause of the accident wasn't immediately known, but debris that damaged wing insulation during launch on Jan. 16 immediately led speculation at NASA. During launch, a piece of debris from the external fuel tank struck the orbiter's left wing and damaged the tiles that protect the shuttle from the extreme heat it endures during re-entry. "They dedicated their lives to pushing the scientific challenges for all of us here on earth," NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe said. "They dedicated themselves to that objective and did it with a happy heart and great enthusiasm. The loss of this valiant crew is something we will never get over." O'Keefe said there was no indica-



Shuttle Columbia's crew, from left, front row, are Rick Husband, Kalpana Chawla, William McCool; back row, David Brown, Laurel Clark, Michael Anderson and Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon. NASA lost communication with space shuttle Columbia as the ship and its seven astronauts soared over Texas several minutes before its expected landing Saturday. Columbia's science mission had

tion of terrorism or anything or anyone on the ground causing the mishap. He promised an immediate investigation by an independent panel and said President Bush and Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge have offered help in the recovery effort and investigation. Associate administrator Bill Readdy, a former astronaut, said, "sadly, I think from the video that is available, it does not appear there were any survivors." Columbia's science mission had been delayed multiple times because of technical and other concerns. Like the other shuttles, it had welding repairs on its fuel-pipe liners last summer. Columbia was the oldest shuttle, but it completed a \$145 million overhaul in 2001. On Friday, NASA officials said they did not think the damage from the launch was bad enough to cause any problem with the orbiter landing. NASA weather officer John Madora said that at 200,000 feet — the orbiter's altitude when it was destroyed — the shuttle was in the mesosphere. That's a very predictable portion of the atmosphere, at least in terms of weather, he said. There was nothing there to interfere with an orbiter's normal flight pattern. However, it is extremely hot in the mesosphere, Madora said. At the shuttle's altitude, it was just leaving the plasmosphere, which is the hottest portion of the atmosphere. To people on the ground, the shuttle seemed to disappear. Mission controllers went silent shortly after 9 a.m., when they stopped getting telemetry and voice communications from the

See Columbia, **2A**