

From: SC News from SCIWAY <sciway-news@sc-news.net>
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov
Date: 1/28/2016 1:22:19 PM
Subject: Today in SC History: Ron McNair and the Challenger Explosion

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{ SC's February Calendar + Our Featured SC Event }

February 27 — This year's **February Calendar of Events** is brought to you by Charleston's 7 **Brewvival**, a celebration of craft beer's finest and the community that surrounds it. Each bee selected from our favorite breweries – local, regional, American, or otherwise – and presented in an outdoor environment, quite often by the folks who make it. Live music, friendly food vendors, and an occasional speaker round out the afternoon, but beer takes the center stage. Expect a wide variety of styles and serving methods, ranging from semi-common to impossibly rare, all of which are available while the day's supplies last. Brewvival welcomes beer geeks, casual craft drinkers, and novices alike. It's a festival full of exclusive beers that excludes no one. It's a festival full of beer because there are no VIPs.

[See all the other great South Carolina events coming up in February.](#)

{ Honoring SC Native Ronald McNair: 30 Years Since the Challenger }

If you are like us, you remember exactly where you were when you learned the Challenger had exploded, killing all seven astronauts on board. In my case, I watched it happen in Mrs. Jean Beus's fifth-grade classroom. What many don't know is that one of the astronauts hailed from our own state. Today, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, I honor Ronald McNair, one of South Carolina's finest sons. — [Robin](#)

Among the most illustrious figures in the history of South Carolina was [Lake City](#) native Dr. [Ronald McNair](#). Though McNair is widely remembered as one of the seven astronauts killed in the Ja

1986 explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, he led a distinguished life on the ground in addition to logging 191 hours in space on the *Challenger's* February, 1984 mission, McNair, a renowned laser physicist, fifth-degree black belt, saxophonist and composer, and husband and father. The below park and museum honor the life and many accomplishments of Dr. McNair, who was killed when he died.

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Planning for the Dr. Ronald E. McNair Memorial Park in the astronaut's home town began in 1984 in collaboration among the Ronald McNair Committee, a community organization dedicated to preserving McNair's legacy; the City of Lake City; and the Lake City Library Board. The city broke ground for the park in 1991, and it was dedicated on February 11, 1992, eight years to the day of McNair's commission as a specialist on the *Challenger's* first landing at Kennedy Space Center. Three years later, a life-sized bronze sculpture of McNair, created by Detroit artist Ed Chesney, was added to the park along with a granite memorial to McNair made by the Coastal Monument Company in Conway, South Carolina. See below.

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The memorial contains inscriptions outlining many of McNair's achievements. Born on October 21, 1938, McNair was educated in Florence County's segregated public schools. Following his 1967 graduation from Carver High School - now Ronald E. McNair Middle School - McNair went on to North Carolina State University, earning a bachelor of science degree in physics in 1971. From there he studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, receiving a doctorate of philosophy in physics in 1975. During his time at MIT that McNair immersed himself in the study of lasers, and upon earning his degree, he became a laser physicist with Hughes Research Laboratories in Malibu, California. He was qualified to become a NASA mission specialist in 1979 after completing a year of training. He became the second African-American in space in 1984.

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Standing alone within the park is McNair's tomb, seen below. In June of 2004, McNair's remains were relocated from his original burial site within Rest Lawn Memorial Cemetery, about five miles from the park, to their current location. The tomb is flanked by the American flag and the South Carolina state flag; the Christian flag stands in the center. A gas-lit flame protected within a lamp flickers before the tomb, and the sepulcher is surrounded by water.

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A newer addition to the park is the Ronald McNair Life History Center, seen below, which opened in 2011. The center is a museum dedicated to McNair and is the result of the Ronald McNair Community Foundation, which worked for years to open a Lake City museum to honor the late astronaut. The museum is housed in a building that bears a story from McNair's boyhood in the segregated South. Once a public building, it was used as a school for African-American children. The building was later used as a pub.

this building was the site where a nine-year-old McNair attempted to check out science books. The librarian denied McNair the books based on his race.



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In a peaceful act of defiance, the young McNair told the librarian that he would patiently wait allow him to check out the books. In response, the librarian called the police to resolve the McNair's mother was also called to the library. Upon arriving, the police persuaded the libra McNair check out the books. Today, the library that once tried to prohibit McNair from checking now stands as a museum in his honor. The account has been retold in a children's book, [Mission](#), by Corrine J. Naden and Rose J. Blue. The Ronald E. McNair Life History Center expand into a science and technology museum.

{ Meet Our Photographers, Series No. 7: Linda Brown }

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Our mailing address is PO Box 13318, James Island, South Carolina 29422.

SCIWAY, pronounced "sky-way," is an acronym for South Carolina's Information Highway.

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