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## **Starstruck Cedarville Alumna Moonwalking Over New NASA Job**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- When Cindy Hasselbring accompanied her parents to a Cedarville University homecoming weekend in the 1980s, she wound up in the university bookstore looking at posters. She left with one of an astronaut conducting a spacewalk with the words “and those who dare to dream dare to do” written across it.

Now, Hasselbring is living her childhood dream as an educational advocate with NASA’s NextGen STEM team. Daring to dream has become daring to do.

Hasselbring, who graduated from Cedarville in 1995 with a [Bachelor of Arts in mathematics](#) and an emphasis in secondary education, has always had a love for space exploration. She remembered an early childhood vacation to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida that sparked her interest in space exploration.

“We walked through the Saturn V building, stood near the launch pad and my parents even bought me a mini space shuttle,” Hasselbring said. “That really inspired me when I was young. I wanted to be an astronaut, but in middle school, I also grew to love math. I realized that a career in math education would also be very fulfilling.”

Hasselbring has applied five times to NASA’s astronaut candidate program since 2003, and she was invited to interview once in 2013. As a part of a teacher cohort of applicants, Hasselbring was given the opportunity to fly on two reduced gravity flights and conducted an experiment planned by her students during one of them.

Though she hasn’t become an astronaut, Hasselbring has coined a phrase to describe how those ‘failures’ have shaped her life: rejection as redirection.

“I never dreamed that the ‘failure’ of not becoming an astronaut could lead to so many other amazing opportunities,” Hasselbring said.

After graduating from Cedarville, Hasselbring returned to her hometown of Milan, Michigan, where she taught math and coached cross country and track for 16 years at Milan High School.

“I didn’t ever plan to leave permanently, but I was always looking for ways to learn and grow,” she explained. “I applied for the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program in 2011 and was accepted into the 11-month intensive fellowship.”

Hasselbring traveled to Washington, D.C., for the teaching fellowship where she was placed with the National Science Foundation (NSF). During her first year in the program, she was asked to stay for a second year. Her school in Milan asked whether she would be returning and Hasselbring took the leap of faith to leave her hometown after seeking wise counsel.

“My pastor told me, ‘God has this door wide open for you. Who are you to shut it?’ Hasselbring shared. “I realized that while I could always return to teaching, I couldn’t always return to this program.”

Hasselbring did not return to teaching, but rather, began what would become a successful and exciting career in STEM education advocacy. While at the NSF, she connected with the state superintendent of Maryland State Department of Education, who offered her a job.

A few years into her job working with Maryland schools, a school administrator in the state called Hasselbring to ask about high school aviation curriculums. Hasselbring didn’t know of any, but she emailed the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) to inquire. AOPA told her that they were in the preliminary stages of developing an initiative focused on high school students, and when Hasselbring expressed interest in the project, they invited her to interview.

“I became a senior director of the high school aviation initiative at AOPA, led curriculum development and loved it,” Hasselbring explained. “Then in February of 2019, I got a random email from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy asking me to interview.”

From February to August, Hasselbring underwent interviews and onboarding that resulted in her being hired as an assistant director and senior policy advisor at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Detailed by the NSF, Hasselbring worked at the White House through February 2021 to help shape K-12 STEM education policy.

She continued with the NSF through August 19, 2021, all the while wondering about her next step. Then, Hasselbring got a call.

“In April, a team member from NASA called,” Hasselbring said. “He was someone I’d worked closely with in my time at OSTP and asked if I would like to come work for NASA. Of course, I said yes! It has been wonderful. My first day was September 13, 2021.”

At NASA, Hasselbring works in the Office of STEM Engagement, focusing on K-12 STEM education. As part of the NextGen STEM team, she engages with contractors to develop a collaborative and professional online learning platform for educators. The platform will connect educators with NASA’s content and share information about exclusive educational events and will be ready for the public in January 2022.

“I’ve been passionate my entire career about helping students see the opportunities and careers they could have in STEM,” Hasselbring said. “I also love getting teachers resources from NASA directly into their hands.”

As she continues adjusting to her new position at NASA, Hasselbring is grateful for how her time at Cedarville prepared her for such a robust career.

“A well-rounded education is so important,” Hasselbring explained. “I thought I’d planned out my career as a math teacher, but public speaking, event planning, service, giving presentations — God built up those skills in my education at Cedarville.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [Bachelor of Arts in mathematics](#) program, strong graduation, and retention rates, accredited professional and health

science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit [cedarville.edu](http://cedarville.edu).

**Written by Heidie Raine**