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Doyle signs space bill

Will ease way for Spaceport Sheboygan

By [Eric LaRose](#)

Sheboygan Press staff April 15, 2006

To infinity — and beyond.

Gov. Jim Doyle signed a bill Friday morning to create the Wisconsin Aerospace Authority, giving a boost to the effort of a group of Sheboygan-area business and community leaders to develop a \$15 million space and science education center at the Sheboygan Armory.

"It's exciting," said Sen. Joe Leibham, R-Sheboygan, who co-authored the bill with Rep. Steve Kestell, R-Elkhart Lake. "It brings Sheboygan another step closer to having the opportunity to participate in a growing and exciting new economic frontier."

Leibham said the search has begun for people to serve on the authority.

The Wisconsin Aerospace Authority will help move the proposed Great Lakes Aerospace Science & Education Center at Spaceport Sheboygan toward a planned March 2008 opening, according to the Sheboygan Development Corp.

The group, which is planning the 52,000-square-foot complex, has said it needs to raise \$14.5 million to make the project a reality — about \$11 million from foundations and private contributions and the remainder from government grants.

The money will be used to transform the Sheboygan Armory, which was built in 1941 and costs the city \$150,000 a year to maintain, into an educational complex that includes an IMAX theater, planetarium, interactive exhibits and potentially a zero-gravity simulator and NASA-affiliated museum, developers say.

Mike Muth of the SDC said the bill signing means a lot for the development.

"This is one of those things that, on the surface, may not seem that important, but it's kind of one of these 'but for' things," Muth said. "If there is going to be any federal money coming our way, there has to be an agency by which it can pass through Madison to get to Spaceport Sheboygan."

The bill could mean more jobs for Sheboygan and the state, Leibham said.

Jim Testwuide, of the Rockets for Schools educational program, said the bill is one small step toward establishing an aerospace industry in Wisconsin. Rockets for Schools, which would be incorporated into the spaceport, draws hundreds of students annually to build and launch rockets in a science-based competition formerly held at the Armory. The rockets are launched over Lake Michigan from South Pier.

"We're in the early stages of 15 mph railroad travel now, as far as space travel, but we're going

to go a lot further. It's going to happen and we're certainly going to be a major player," Testwuide said.

Leibham said billions of dollars are spent and hundreds of jobs are created in the aerospace industry every year.

"Traditionally, most of the aerospace industry currently participates out of the southern part of the country," Leibham said. "But as the aerospace industry is evolving into new technologies, they are finding the need to create these potential spaceports at different places in the country."

A large no-fly zone over Lake Michigan, a remnant of military exercises at the former Camp Haven, gives Sheboygan access into space, Leibham said.

"We have a unique window to space that's exciting to the aerospace industry," he said.

Reach Eric LaRose at elarose@sheboygan-press.com and 453-5167.

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Posted April 2, 2006

Countdown to Spaceport

By Eric Litke

Sheboygan Press staff

Rockets and space tourism may not be in Sheboygan's immediate future, but a science complex could be, with the help of a bill passed by the state legislature that Gov. Jim Doyle will sign in the next three weeks, according to spokesman Dan Leistikow.

Senate Bill 352 will create the Wisconsin Aerospace Authority and move the \$15 million Great Lakes Aerospace Science & Education Center at Spaceport Sheboygan toward a planned March 2008 opening, developers say.

Leistikow said Doyle "supports the bill," and will act on it by April 20. It was passed by the state Senate, 25-7, on March 2 and by a voice vote in the Assembly on March 9.

"That space authority bill was critical," said Gary Dulmes of Sheboygan Development Corp., which is developing the 52,000-square-foot complex. "If and when we receive money from the federal government, there's a conduit to receive the money. It gives a lot more legitimacy to our project."

SDC needs to raise \$14.5 million to make the project a reality, approximately \$11 million from foundations and private contributions and the remainder from government grants, according to SDC's March 2006 business plan.

The money will be used to transform the Sheboygan Armory, which was built in 1941 and costs the city \$150,000 a year to maintain, into a science complex that includes an IMAX theater, planetarium, interactive exhibits and potentially a zero-gravity simulator and NASA-affiliated museum, developers say.

Dulmes said they believe the center can attract 175,000 people annually by its fifth year.

"We want to try to create an experience for the kids and the whole family," said Mike Muth of the SDC. "'Shock and awe' might be a little bit graphic, but that's the intent. We don't want this to be a yawner."

The planned science and education center is commonly referred to as Spaceport Sheboygan, but that term technically refers to an area of restricted airspace over Lake Michigan from Port Washington to Manitowoc, according to the SDC business plan. The City of Sheboygan has state permission to build a future public-use spaceport within that area.

But Sheboygan will not be Cape Canaveral, North Campus any time in the near future.

"Is there going to be commercial space travel? Yes. Will it be

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Gary Dulmes, one of the main figures behind the push to create a spaceport in Sheboygan, stands in front of the Sheboygan Armory Saturday. Press photo/Sam Castro

What is the Wisconsin Aerospace Authority?

n Oversee a fund into which all local, state and federal spaceport moneys are deposited. Federal grants require a receiving authority.

n Develop and operate future Wisconsin spaceports, including in the City of Sheboygan. To this end, the WAA will be able to issue bonds, acquire property, exercise eminent domain and enter into contracts.

n Consist of nine members, six of which are appointed by the governor and approved by the state senate, one appointed by the president of the senate, one appointed by the speaker of the assembly and one who is the director of the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium. Members will serve three-year terms.

n Promote the aerospace industry in Wisconsin.

Tentative Spaceport Sheboygan timeline

*.April 06-June 06 – develop architectural and engineering schematics

*.July 06 – hire executive director and assistant

*.July 06-December 06 – development of building and site design

*.October 06 – final project decisions, design development cost estimates



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here? Who knows ... but that was not the purpose of the aerospace authority bill," Dulmes said. "There's other firms that are out there trying to do it, seeing it as a huge moneymaker, but it certainly isn't on our radar."

State Sen. Joe Leibham, R-Sheboygan, who proposed the WAA bill, said the nine-member WAA would oversee potential future use as a launch site, but Dulmes said nothing larger than the 10- to 12-foot rockets used annually by Rockets for Schools is in the SDC business plan.

Rockets for Schools has used the Spaceport Sheboygan airspace since 1995, and more than 300 sixth- through 12th-grade students from Wisconsin and surrounding states participate.

The SDC business plan calls for an executive director and assistant to be hired in July, with design work and construction bids leading up to a planned groundbreaking in February 2007, but the timeline depends entirely on fundraising, Muth said.

"To be honest with you I don't know if we'll be able to raise the money," Muth said Friday. "It's our hope that we will break ground next spring, but it all depends on how much money we can get committed."

But both Muth and Dulmes said "failure is not an option," a quote from the movie "Apollo 13," when Houston Mission Control is figuring out how to bring the damaged Apollo craft back to earth.

"It's a lot of money, and it's a major project for the SDC, and a major addition to the City of Sheboygan," Dulmes said. "If we can't make it so that we know it can work, we won't do it. It's a promise we've made to ourselves. ... We're not going in with a pie-in-the-sky plan."

The SDC is talking with potential donors and applying for federal grants, but the only substantive donation announced to date has been the armory itself, which has been promised to SDC along with a 99-year lease. The SDC values the building and lease at \$1.5 million.

Muth said SDC has applied for several federal grants, and Dulmes said the group is talking with several major donors and hopes to make a "major announcement" within the next six months.

Project Manager Jolena Presti of Vandewalle & Associates, which is consulting with SDC on the science complex project, said the group is in a "big due diligence phase."

"There's so much to learn about the space science education world out there that there's a lot of research that needs to be done," Presti said.

The developers' research included a "fact-finding trip" March 20-22 to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Johnson Space Center in Houston and the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala.

The group, which included Muth, Presti, Dulmes and Wisconsin astronaut and project advocate Mark Lee, spent three days talking to the administrators of each facility, meeting with potential donors and partners and gathering ideas to implement in Sheboygan.

"We were certainly inspired by going through these facilities and talking to these people, that this can happen," Muth said. "The three of these places look to us as a compliment to them, not a competitor."

Presti said the group will use the information they gathered to start "developing the experience of the center," which they expect to build excitement that will aid fundraising efforts.

Mayor Juan Perez, who has been assured by SDC that city funds will not be used for the project, said Sheboygan is looking forward to working with the group.

"I think it's a very reasonable, very attractive plan," Perez said. "The right people are involved."

*October 06-February 07 – exhibit design and construction, prepare construction and bid documentation

*February 07-March 08 – Spaceport construction

*March 08 – Grand opening

Source: Preliminary business plan by Vandewalle & Associates of Madison

Planned spaceport components:

- * Hands-on laboratories
 - * Classrooms
 - * IMAX theater
 - * Planetarium
 - * Retail store
 - * Cafe
 - * Outdoor displays
 - * Educator resource center
 - * Astronauts of the Midwest exhibit
 - * Space experience summer camp
- Source: Preliminary business plan by Vandewalle & Associates of Madison

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More federal money for heating assistance

Wisconsin will get an increase in federal funding for the program to help low-income people heat their homes this winter. The state will get an extra \$3.9 million in emergency aid on top of the \$69.7 million already allocated.

Program helps businesses get government contracts

A Madison Area Technical College program helped Wisconsin businesses snare \$292.3 million in government contracts last year. The Business Procurement Assistance Center sponsored 33 training events attended by 400 participants in 2005 and provided 2,600 individual counseling sessions.

New law will help venture capitalists

Gov. Jim Doyle signed legislation in January to remove obstacles from the state's incentives for venture capitalists. The new law, which passed the Legislature without opposition in the fall, will make it easier for early seed and angel investors to get tax credits for projects they finance, Doyle said.

CAPITOL BUSINESS

Sheboygan: Not just for bratwurst anymore?

Lawmakers propose creating a spaceport on the shore of Lake Michigan.

By Jenny Price

Houston. Cape Canaveral. Sheboygan? Some lawmakers are pushing a bill that would clear the way for the east-central Wisconsin city — known more for bratwurst than space exploration — to establish a launch and landing area for spacecraft.

The legislation would create the Wisconsin Aerospace Authority, charged with developing a business plan for spaceport-related commercial and educational development in the state and attracting and keeping space-related businesses in Wisconsin.

Businesses connected to the space program, including some in the Madison area, are squarely behind the idea. Supporters contend it could foster more discoveries in the high technology community and keep young people from leaving the state to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

"It's good for those of us that are in the aerospace community here in the state," said Marty Gustafson, commercial applications manager for Madison companies PLANET LLC and ORBITEC.

About the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium

What: A 35-member network of public and private universities and colleges, industries, government agencies, non-profit associations and other entities with space and aerospace interests. Founded in 1991.

Where: Headquartered at UW-Green Bay.

Mission: To coordinate and improve Wisconsin's future in aerospace science, design and technology.

Activities: Provides grants to undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, educators and industry partners throughout the state to pursue scholarship and research studies and programs. It also serves as a central clearinghouse for information and is considered the "face of NASA" in the state of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium:
www.uwgb.edu/WSGC

Rockets for Schools: www.rockets4schools.org

"It's not just something that happens in Texas and Florida and California. There are companies that are working very hard with NASA right now and trying really hard to get more aerospace business into our state."

ORBITEC, short for Orbital Technologies Corporation, is a research and development firm that has developed spaceflight hardware programs. PLANET LLC develops ORBITEC's technologies into new commercial products for research.

The space authority would not be a state agency but would be tax exempt and eligible for federal funding. The governor and legislative leaders would appoint a nine-member board to guide the enterprise, with all members required to have experience in aerospace, education, finance or related fields.

Wisconsin is not the only state trying to get a piece of aerospace action.

Oklahoma and Montana, among other states, are making efforts to establish spaceports. More recently, British entrepreneur Richard Branson chose New Mexico as the site to launch Virgin Galactic, the first company to develop commercial flights to space, expected to begin in 2008.

The economic possibilities are what piqued the interest of Sen. Joe Leibham, R-Sheboygan, the bill's author. He contends the space tourism industry could generate \$1 billion a year by 2020.

But some also see the spaceport as an educational opportunity for Wisconsin's aspiring astronauts, scientists and entrepreneurs.

The proposed spaceport site along the shore of Lake Michigan, already located in restricted airspace, is used for a program that allows students to build and launch rockets as well as design science experiments to send up on high-altitude balloons.

"Students from across the state have been doing this. They're excited and oftentimes they come to me and say 'What's next?'" said R. Aileen Yngst, director of the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium, which sponsors the student projects. "I don't want to have to send these kids to Florida.

"We have brilliant students who are just begging for more and I want to be able to let them go as far as they can here, because most of them want to stay here."

Yngst, who would sit on the proposed space authority's board, said the spaceport would allow Wisconsin students to design and launch satellites meant to go into low Earth orbit and prepare them



GEORGE MCGUIC

for the more advanced work of building satellites to go to the moon or Mars.

"To me, this is an extraordinarily important thing for the high technology advancement of Wisconsin," she said "That's the economy. That's education. That's everything."

NASA operates federal spaceports that conduct both commercial and government launches; non-federal commercial spaceports must be licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration and get approval from the Department of Environmental Protection.

There are five commercial spaceports licensed nationwide: at Cape Canaveral in Florida; the Virginia Space Flight Center; the Mojave Airport and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California; and the Kodiak Launch Complex in Alaska. ■

Jenny Price is a Madison freelance reporter. She can be reached at jenny.price@gmail.com.

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QUOTABLE.
Wisconsin State Journal

Sheboygan seeks space fame

After a decade of liftoffs, Wisconsin envisions a space-tourism cash cow.

Tim Jones Chicago Tribune

January 29, 2006

SHEBOYGAN, Wis. -- Some people, as Robert Kennedy once said, are content to look at the world and ask why.

But in Sheboygan, where untold thousands of tons of sausage have been crammed into sheep casings, some yearn for a life beyond the smoky barbecue haze of the "Bratwurst Capital of the World." So they look to the heavens and ask: "Why not?"

Why not make Sheboygan a launchpad to outer space?

Why let Florida's legendary Cape Canaveral be the nation's tourist magnet for most things space when Sheboygan could just as easily be the Midwest space-research center and 21st-century catapult, hurtling rockets and vaulting adventurous people into the wild black yonder?

That's the plan Sheboygan officials envision. Build on an existing annual rocketry event on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Attract millions of the curious by converting a World War II-vintage armory into a space-research center and build a planetarium next door.

And then, with an infusion of private and public money, cash in on the next new frontier: commercial tourism that would carry small groups of people in rocket jet vehicles for half-hour, quarter-million-dollar, suborbital rides into space.

Despite predictable jokes about sending brat-shaped, mustard-slathered rockets into space, the Sheboygan proposal might not be goofy at all.

As Jim Testwuide, a local businessman involved in the Wisconsin proposal, said, "It's not just five sod-lifters from Sheboygan" with a big idea. "We feel it has legs to take off," Testwuide said.

Here's why. Sheboygan has been firing small rockets into the atmosphere -- some as high as 35 miles -- for a decade, as part of the Rockets for Schools program. The area boasts a massive block of restricted airspace over Lake Michigan, which provides an ideal safety buffer for rocket and jet-plane space launches. The Federal Aviation Administration has already granted Sheboygan authorization for suborbital flights, and horizontal launches would fit neatly into the Sheboygan plan.

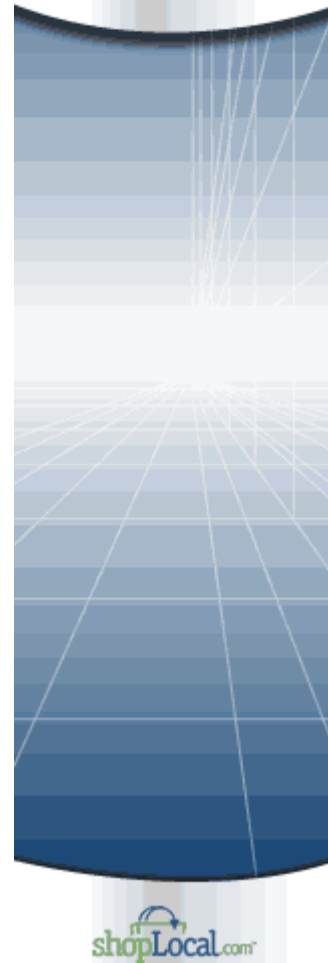
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Spaceport USA - in Sheboygan?

By Tim Jones
Chicago Tribune

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Strong competition

Despite predictable jokes about sending bratwurst-shaped, mustard-slathered rockets into space, the Sheboygan proposal might not be goofy at all. In fact, communities in Florida, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, California, Alaska and several other states are also vying for a piece of the evolving space-tourism business, and they have assembled armies of lawyers, financiers, deep-pocketed CEOs and politicians to prime the galactic pump.

Along Lake Michigan, Jim Testwuide, a local businessman involved in the Wisconsin proposal, said, "We feel it has legs to take off," Testwuide said.

Here's why. Sheboygan has been firing small rockets into the atmosphere — some as high as 35 miles — for a decade, as part of the popular Rockets for Schools program. The area boasts a massive block of restricted air space over Lake Michigan, granted by the government more than a half-century ago for military munitions testing.



This over-the-water, no-fly zone provides an ideal safety buffer for vertical rocket and horizontal jet-plane space launches. The Federal Aviation Administration has already granted Sheboygan authorization for suborbital flights, and horizontal launches would fit neatly into the Sheboygan plan.

"Nobody's talking about launching gigantic missiles off," Testwuide said, trying to dispel the image of a northern Cape Canaveral. "We're talking space planes, not rockets."

Former astronauts, including James Lovell, have endorsed the Spaceport Sheboygan proposal. Plenty of area politicians have joined the why-not chorus. The Wisconsin state legislature is considering a measure ("out of this world," claimed the bill's sponsor) to create a state aerospace authority, which could sell up to \$100 million in bonds to purchase yet-to-be-identified land and build a launch facility.

In the broader context of old cities reinventing themselves — Pittsburgh moving from big steel to high-tech and Raleigh, N.C., from textiles and tobacco to technology and education — Sheboygan is but one player on a long list of communities trying to plan for the future.

Giant leap for Sheboygan

By any measure, though, Spaceport Sheboygan is quite a leap, as it is for most other communities vying for the pole position in the risky and expensive commercial space race.

Some are moving faster than others. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush asked state lawmakers this month to commit \$55 million in next year's budget to attract new space ventures to Florida.

New Mexico last month committed to spending about \$130 million — roughly half the cost of construction — to build a desert launch facility that would be used by British entrepreneur Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic space tourism company. Sightseeing space flights from the site near the White Sands Missile Range are scheduled to begin in late 2008.

"It's absolutely feasible to have a spaceport anywhere there is interest and where economically it makes sense to do it," said Jim Banke, vice president of Florida operations for the Space Foundation, a Colorado Springs, Colo.-based nonprofit advocate for the space industry.

"But it has to make economic sense," Banke said

To which Testwuide says, why not?

"We're going to bring Sheboygan out of the oom-pah band stage," he said.

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Jan. 28, 2006, 10:41PM

Someday you might hear: Sheboygan, we have liftoff

Wisconsin city plans to build a spaceport, offer rides to tourists

By **TIM JONES**
Chicago Tribune

SHEBOYGAN, WIS. - Some people, as Robert Kennedy once said, are content to look at the world and ask why.

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It's tempting to dismiss "Spaceport Sheboygan," as it is called, as another hokey Wisconsin tourist gimmick. But the Sheboygan proposal might not be goofy at all. Along Lake Michigan, Jim Testwuide, a local businessman involved in the proposal, said, "It's not just five sod-lifters from Sheboygan" with a big idea. "We feel it has legs to take off," Testwuide said.

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Former astronauts, including James Lovell, have endorsed the Spaceport Sheboygan proposal. Plenty of area politicians have joined the why-not chorus.

The Wisconsin Legislature is considering a measure to create a state aerospace authority, which could sell up to \$100 million in bonds to purchase yet-to-be-identified land and build a launch facility.

Sheboygan plans a groundbreaking for the space center next winter, with a targeted opening date of March 2008.

Building a launch site for commercial space travel may be years down the road because private and public financing, public support and political will to endorse it are not assured.

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Sheboygan wants to be big cheese in space

Wisconsin town sets sights on strange new world of astro-tourism

By Tim Jones
Tribune national correspondent

January 29, 2006

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It's tempting to dismiss "Spaceport Sheboygan," as it is called, as another hokey Wisconsin tourist gimmick in a state where communities boast of enormous plastic cows, a gigantic penny and the world's biggest fiberglass fish (143 feet long). Just about an hour north of here, in tiny Poland, a farmer last year turned a 42-foot-long fuel tank on its head and put a metal platform on top, making it the state's only "U.F.O. Landing Port."

"We're Not the Only Ones," reads the sign beneath Poland's metal welcome mat for little green people from far away.

Might not be so goofy

Despite predictable jokes about sending brat-shaped, mustard-slathered rockets into space, the Sheboygan

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proposal might not be goofy at all. In fact, communities in Florida, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, California, Alaska and several other states are also vying for a piece of the evolving space tourism business, and they have assembled armies of lawyers, financiers, deep-pocketed CEOs and politicians to prime the galactic pump.

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Sheboygan is the only proposed Midwestern site, prompting Lovell to call it "a rare opportunity to create this compelling regional destination."

Supporters downplay concerns about cold weather and emphasize that the tourist ventures would involve planes, not rockets, that take off from airport-like runways. At an altitude of about 35,000 feet, a rocket plane attached to the jet and carrying tourists would detach and zoom to an altitude of perhaps 60 miles. Then it would return for a landing at the launch site.

In the broader context of old cities reinventing themselves--Pittsburgh moving from big steel to high-tech, and Raleigh, N.C., from textiles and tobacco to technology and education--Sheboygan is but one player on a long list of communities trying to plan for the future. By any measure, though, Spaceport Sheboygan is quite a leap, as it is for most other communities vying for the pole position in the risky and expensive commercial space race.

But it's doable, supporters insist. And it is, they add, an imperative with a familiar ring to it. Just as the Soviets took the lead in the space race in the 1950s and early '60s, the Russians currently own the nascent market for space tourism.

"There has been a pent-up demand for space for a long time," said George French, president of Rocketplane Ltd. Inc., an Oklahoma-based company that is building a reusable spaceship, similar to a private jet with a rocket attached.

"The Baby Boomers who grew up on '2001: A Space Odyssey' expected that they would be able to fly [into space]. It isn't going to happen unless states and the private sector do something," French said.

Some are moving faster than others. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush asked state lawmakers this month to commit \$55

million in next year's budget to attract new space ventures to Florida. Bush is also pushing the development of a commercial spaceport, which would operate much like a commercial service airport.

New Mexico last month committed to spending about \$130 million--roughly half the cost of construction--to build a desert launch facility that would be used by British entrepreneur Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic airline. Sightseeing spaceflights from the site near the White Sands Missile Range are scheduled to begin in late 2008, although there is some political resistance to using state money for the launch site while the state has other demands.

Groundbreaking next winter

Sheboygan is not that far down the development road. The city plans a groundbreaking for the proposed space center next winter, with a targeted opening date of March 2008. Building a launch site for commercial space travel may be years down the road because private and public financing, public support and political will to endorse it are not assured.

And the trips are, to say the least, pricey--anywhere from \$200,000 to \$350,000 for an adventure that lasts about as long as America's first astronaut in space, Alan Shepard, took for his inaugural suborbital leap in 1961.

"It's absolutely feasible to have a spaceport anywhere there is interest and where economically it makes sense to do it," said Jim Banke, vice president of Florida operations for the Space Foundation, a Colorado Springs-based non-profit advocate for the space industry.

"But it has to make economic sense," Banke said

To which Testwuide says, why not?

"We're going to bring Sheboygan out of the oompah band stage," he said.

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Bill Wangemann column: Sheboygan Armory has long, colorful history

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Soon the very last high school basketball game will be played in Sheboygan's venerable Armory. Since its construction began in March 1941 as a WPA project, the art deco-styled Armory has graced our lakefront.

The WPA, which stood for the Works Project Administration — or as it was known after 1939, the Works Progress Administration — built the Armory. The WPA was an organization that came into being on an executive order issued by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935. The organization was designed to give welfare recipients extra income by giving them jobs during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

WPA workers were put to work constructing schools, public buildings of all kinds, parks, runways and even working in the arts to encourage young artists, musicians and playwrights. The cost of the entire program was in the billions at a time when a billion dollars was an unimaginable sum of money.

Political opponents of the WPA, and there were many, constantly attacked the program and sought to cut funding. But even the most severe detractors of the WPA had to admit the program's accomplishments were impressive.

The WPA, which was disbanded in 1943, could proudly claim that during its tenure, it built 116,000 buildings, 78,000 bridges, 651,000 miles of roads and made improvements to more than 800 airports.

The artistic branch of the WPA, which sponsored young artists, could claim more than 10,000 drawings and paintings, many in public buildings as well as over 4,000 plays and musical performances.

By 1943, with the ever-expanding job market and the extreme demand for workers in industry placed upon it by the demands of World War II, the WPA was no longer needed and went out of being.

Of those 116,000 buildings, the Sheboygan Armory, the Sheboygan County Courthouse, Urban Junior High School and various sewer and park projects were all built by the WPA.

The original intended purpose of the Armory was that it be just that: an armory for Sheboygan's unit of the Wisconsin National Guard. The building was equipped with ammunition lockers and vaults for guns and other military equipment used by the Guard. The original blueprints of the building included offices for the commanding officer and other officers.

The main floor is listed on the building plans as an indoor drill floor for training troops. The original intention of the building is further indicated by the military designs embedded in the marble floor of the lobby just inside the main entrances. Beneath the Armory are indoor garages used to park military vehicles. The blueprints included an indoor rifle range in the basement.

This basement area is now used by various city departments to store equipment and supplies. Originally the building was heated by two large boilers that burned coal; now, only one boiler is used and it has been

converted to natural gas. Huge coal bins that could be filled from the outside still exist, and some still have a bit of coal in them.

But the designers of the Armory had other uses in mind as well, and the building was set up to provide flexible seating for various civic functions. The capacity for a basketball game is 3,161, and 3,693 spectators can be seated when the building is set up for wrestling. If a stage show is presented, the entire main floor can be utilized for seating, giving the building a maximum seating capacity of 3,975. The building is equipped with a partial kitchen and can seat 700 people for a banquet.

Constructed of poured concrete, the Armory was built like a fortress, and for the most part the main structure is in excellent condition.

Over the years, many celebrities played at the Armory, including Bob Hope, Alice Cooper, Danny Davis and the Nashville Brass, Crystal Gayle and the never-to-be-forgotten performance of the Harlem Globetrotters. Notable political figures such as Jessie Jackson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey all appeared on the Armory's stage.

Not only have North and South high schools — and in an earlier time Central and North high schools — battled each other there many times, but the Armory was the scene of the beginnings of professional basketball. Sheboygan's own Redskins were charter members of the league then known as the National Basketball League, which later became the National Basketball Association in 1949.

All in all, it's not a bad record for a grand old building still gracing our lakefront after 65 years of service to the city. Maybe, with luck, it will be with us another 65 years.

Today's tidbit: As a security measure when the Armory was used by the National Guard, nearly every door in the building has a different key.

All of the columns I wrote in 2004 have been compiled into a book, "Grandma, What Did You Do Before TV?" and will be available at the Sheboygan County Historic Research Center in Sheboygan Falls and other locations later this year. For more information on this book, e-mail schrc@execpc.com or call (920) 467-4667. If you have comments on this column, please feel free to contact me at wwangemann@charter.net or (920) 458-2974.