Astronaut to run Boston Marathon in space

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

NASA astronaut Suni Williams will go faster than anyone has ever gone in the Boston Marathon. She will run the famed race in April as an official entrant from 210 miles above Earth aboard the International Space Station. This will be the first time an astronaut in space will be an official participant in a marathon. Williams hopes her unique run will serve as an inspiration."I encourage kids to start making physical fitness part of their daily lives," Williams said. "I think a big goal like a marathon will help get this message out there."

Astronaut Sunita L. Williams. Image credit: NASA

Williams, who is an accomplished marathoner, has served aboard the space station since December 2006 as a member of the Expedition 14 crew. She will run the race on a station treadmill, circling Earth at least twice in the process, running as fast as eight miles per hour but flying more than five miles each second.And she will not be alone in her adventure. Her sister Dina Pandya and a fellow NASA astronaut, Karen Nyberg, will run the race in Boston. Williams and Nyberg qualified for the Boston race by finishing among the top 100 females in the Houston Marathon in January 2006.Exercise is essential in NASA's efforts to counteract the effects of long-duration weightlessness on astronauts' health. For months, Williams has been training for the marathon while aboard the station. She runs at least four times a week, two longer runs and two shorter runs. Station crews are required to exercise on the treadmill, a stationary bike and a resistive exercise machine to counter loss of bone density and muscle mass."In microgravity, both of these things start to go away because we don't use our legs to walk around and don't need the bones and muscles to hold us up under the force of gravity," Williams said.Williams is a native of Needham, Mass., and graduated from Needham High School in 1983. Her family resides near Falmouth, Mass. NASA will have an exhibit in Boston during the marathon. Nyberg and astronaut Jeff Williams will be available for interviews. Jeff Williams, who is not related to Suni Williams, completed a six-month stay on the station in 2006. NASA's exhibit will be at the John Hancock Sports and Fitness Expo at the Hynes Convention Center April 13-15.Due to the crew's sleep schedule, WIlliams' run of the marathon on the station may not coincide exactly with the race on the ground, but mission control is working to match the events as closely as possible. This year's marathon is Monday, April 16.Television and still imagery of Williams' efforts are expected to be available. Video of her training on the International Space Station will air on NASA TV's Video File. For streaming video, downlink and schedule information, visit: http://www.nasa.gov/ntv