

Blackrock Castle Observatory To Host Live Screening of NASA Astronaut Dan Tani's Return To Earth

Cork. 19th February – After 101 days in space, NASA astronaut Dan Tani is scheduled to return to Earth 20th February at 2:06 p.m. Irish time at Kennedy Space Centre on board the shuttle Atlantis.

Screening of the live event is taking place at the Cork Institute of Technology's new science centre, Blackrock Castle Observatory, in Cork. (www.bco.ie). Ireland's first interactive public science centre is a joint venture between Cork City Council and CIT. The event, supported by Discover Science and Engineering, will be a celebration of Dan Tani's return to Earth and Blackrock Castle Observatory will play host to the Egan family's celebration of the safe return home of their son-in-law. Commentary will be provided by Leo Enright on the ground with Marc O Gríofa, Ireland's young space doctor, providing additional cover. Aisling Judge, 2006 Young Scientist of the Year, from Kinsale, Co Cork, will MC the event. The Lord Mayor of Cork will also be in attendance.

Commenting on the event, Clair McSweeney from Blackrock Castle Observatory said, "We are delighted to have been able to play a part in this amazing story. Dan Tani's time in space has captured the imagination of the Irish public, whilst also allowing us to highlight our country's role in space exploration. By hosting the event of Dan's return we are celebrating the final chapter of his mission to space."

Peter Brabazon, Programme Director, Discover Science & Engineering, said, "Dan Tani is a fantastic inspiration for all budding astronauts across Ireland. To develop as a society and economy, we need scientists and innovators who will shape the future of the Ireland of tomorrow. While this event marks the final chapter in a fascinating story, it also serves to showcase the achievements of Irish scientists. Marc O Gríofa, Ireland's young space doctor, will be at hand to offer his insights on the landing and the International Space Station, where he has had an experiment in operation."

A live on-orbit interview took place between Dan Tani and his Cork family at Blackrock Castle Observatory on 4th February in celebration of Dan's birthday. This event was shared online with many schools in Ireland and with people around the world.

Atlantis and its astronauts brought with them the European Space Agency's Columbus research laboratory. The school bus-sized module represents ESA's primary contribution to the space station and will be the first European laboratory dedicated to long-term research in space. Named after the famous Italian explorer, Columbus will eventually host scientists and experiments from across Europe and will greatly expand the capabilities of ISS.

As he joined the Atlantis crew, Tani logged his 101st day in space on a tour-of-duty that had been scheduled to end in December. The arrival of the shuttle and its crew was a welcome sight for the astronaut who launched into space aboard Discovery last October. NASA extended his mission when fuel gauge problems grounded Atlantis on 6th December and then again on 9th December.

Tani, 47, described his four months in space as a mostly positive experience even though the mission was marred by the tragic death of his mother. Rose Tani, 90, was killed in a train-car crash 19th December near her suburban home. Stuck in space, Tani was unable to attend a memorial service for his mother and became the first American astronaut to lose a close family member while on a mission.

"I'm anxious to get home and see my family," said Tani who ended up spending Christmas and New Years in space because of the Atlantis delays. "I've got a wife and two little girls and I'm missing their growing up, so I can't wait to see them again."

Through their links with the local Egan family, Blackrock Castle Observatory has made the story of an astronaut's journey to space and back a living adventure for all to share. Cosmos at the Castle, the public exhibition at Blackrock Castle Observatory, brings to life the story of space and our place in the Universe for all of its many visitors.

Details of Cosmos at the Castle:

Admission

€6.00 per adult

€4.00 concession

Open daily 10.00am – 5.00 pm

Fridays and Saturdays 11.00am – 5.00 pm

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About Discover Science and Engineering:

Discover Science & Engineering is the national integrated awareness programme, managed by Forfás on behalf of the Office of Science and Technology. Its objectives are to increase the numbers of students studying the physical sciences, to promote a positive attitude to careers in science, engineering and technology and to foster a greater understanding of science and its value to Irish society. For further information please visit www.discover-science.ie

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