NASA Research Center Definitely For Houston

By STEVE McCLEARY

Houston has been officially chosen as the site for the Manned-Flight Space Center, which will conduct the key research necessary for sending man to the moon and beyond. The sixty million dollar center will be located on a tract of land to be donated by Rice.

Reaction at Rice was quite varied. Dr. K. S. Pitzer, President, issued the following statement: “I’m extremely pleased to learn that NASA (National Space and Aeronautics Administration) has decided to locate the manned space flight center at Houston. The excellence of the cooperative research relationship which already exists between NASA and Rice University undoubtedly influenced NASA in its decision.

“THE CENTER at Houston will lead to expansion of space science research on the campus as well as at other universities in the South and Southwest.
“Graduate education and the entire technical community will grow in size and strength.”

At the other end of the scale was the reaction of Rice junior Jack Calfee: “Hey, maybe we can use some of the leftover construction materials to make bookcases out of!”

As last week’s Thresher indicated, it was expected that Houston would be chosen for the lab, but “has been chosen” is far more exciting than “will probably be chosen.”

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RICE WILL LEASE to NASA the thousand acre tract, which is twenty-two miles southeast of downtown Houston. The land (together with adjacent land which Rice will use) was donated to Rice by Humble Oil Company with the understanding that it would be used for the NASA project. Probably the land will be leased without charge.

Three Rice professors will be intimately connected with the lab. They are Dr. Alan Chapman, Dr. Herbert Beckmann, and Dr. Franz Brotzen. Dr. Chapman and Dr. Beckmann have been conducting research on ionized gas jets; Dr. Brotzen, on rare alloys. A fuller discussion of these and other effects of the lab on Rice will be given in next week's Thresher.

THE CENTER WILL have four main divisions: a flight projects facility, an equipment evaluation laboratory, a flight operations facility, and an environmental testing laboratory.

The flight projects facility will be a seven story office building which will serve as management and engineering headquarters and will contain computers and a scientific library. Astronauts will be trained and briefed in it.

In the equipment evaluation lab various equipment and models will be made and tested. The bugs (most of them, anyway) will be worked out of the components of the actual space ships.

SIMULATED flights as well as operations during actual flights will take place in the flight operations facility. A sixty by one hundred foot mirror will aid in optical projections which will show pilots and observers what is happening. A comparison can then be made with what should be happening.

The environmental testing lab will subject full-sized spaceships to the stresses which are expected in actual flight.

For obvious reasons a defense shelter will be included in the project.