Students launch own rockets

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While many plan to celebrate this fourth of July weekend with firework festivities, some students will be watching the sky for their own soaring rockets.

These students are part of SPIRIT, the Student Projects Involving Rocket Investigation Techniques, which is participating in the NYPOWER '99 rocket launch. This event involves a total of 1,200 rockets to be launched during a three-day period tomorrow through Monday, weather permitting, at Geneseo Airport in Geneseo, N.Y.

The main rocket SPIRIT will launch this weekend is a 12-foot scale test model that will measure the temperature in middle atmosphere and detects Earth's magnetic field.

After this weekend, SPIRIT will be able to put the finishing touches on its 36-foot sounding rocket. Although the building and design work are almost done, the final construction of the project is yet to be completed.

"The main goal of the launch this weekend is to do a final test of the equipment," said SPIRIT publicity group leader Susan Shoup.

The completed 36-foot rocket will be launched sometime in the fall after more than two years of
development. The SPIRIT project started when NASA chose it out of 24 proposals from other universities. SPIRIT was chosen because of the educational growth and maturity students would experience during the project's 30-month lifetime.

"SPIRIT has given me real world design experience," Cory Tusar (senior-electrical engineering) said. "I have class and learn, but don't get to build large, major complex designs."

Along with help from NASA, SPIRIT receives support from the College of Engineering, Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium, Engineering Coalition of Schools for Excellence in Education and Leadership, and Lockheed Martin. Students from SUNY-Geneseo and Lincoln University also have contributed to SPIRIT.

To cope with the demands of the project, students are divided into the following five groups: experiments, power and wiring, publicity, structures, and telemetry. The final rocket will come from a collaboration of the groups.

Although the sounding rocket is the main priority of SPIRIT, the group does experiment with other types of rockets. Along with the 12-foot rocket, SPIRIT also will launch some smaller rockets.

Three of these smaller rockets are actually oversized plastic crayon banks converted to rockets. With the addition of fins, engines and parachutes, the crayons will reach a height of 1,500 feet while traveling more than 150 miles per hour.

"The crayons are just for fun. There's been similar things done before," said SPIRIT structures group leader Keith Soldavin.

After this weekend's launch, SPIRIT is nearing the final stages of its project. There is speculation and hope from instructors and students that there will be a SPIRIT II.

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