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What do I think the Coachella Valley needs? A spaceport

Eric Cunningham Special to The Desert Sun

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Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley already have everything that a great city could ask for: A bustling downtown, an international airport, an aerial tramway and 12 square miles of windmill after windmill.

For comparison, New York City doesn't even have 1 square mile of windmill. Los Angeles doesn't have a tram! And Washington D.C., your downtown is just sad.

But despite all we currently offer, there's still one thing we're missing: A spaceport.

What's a spaceport? A seaport is for the sea, an airport is for the air and a spaceport?

Well, a spaceport is for going to space.

The Coachella Valley is actually perfectly positioned for the development of a spaceport. The desert's year-round dry heat and remoteness is ideal for rocket launches. The Rancho Mirage Observatory has regular lines out the door of would-be explorers visiting its powerful research-level telescope.

Palm Desert's iHub – our tech-forward business incubator – is primed to bring together entrepreneurs from across the valley. And Palm Springs' mid-century modern look sure makes it *feel* like the Space Age never ended.

Ideally, we'd have a massive spaceport to rival NASA's Kennedy Space Center or Blue Origin's Launch Site One, or Elon Musk's...barge? OK, well the first two sound cool, and ours could have a cool name like those. Open to suggestions.

But we can start small. The spaceport could launch weather balloons to just barely kiss the edge of space. Or amateur rockets that still go very high, even if it's not technically outer-space-high. By thinking small, a new spaceport could be as simple as a dedicated concrete platform in the desert.

Plus, an arrow-shaped sign pointing up that says, “Space: 60 miles ↑”

And as out-there as this idea may sound, folks in the Coachella Valley are already doing launches even without an official Spaceport. (I’m going to start capitalizing Spaceport now, so you know it’s Important).

Last year, a team of ambitious students at College of the Desert launched a satellite over the Salton Sea to measure carbon dioxide levels. They launched a satellite, did *actual* science on top of that, and did it all sans Spaceport! We have an obligation to help them take their research to the next level.

Beyond scientific applications, our Spaceport could have massive impacts on the economy and tourism. Imagine having a draw like Space Camp, but instead of just twirling around the "big spinny ring chair," kids could *actually* launch something.

A Spaceport would also attract a category of young scientists, academics and tech startups that don’t currently set up shop in the Coachella Valley. Why go to SpaceX to get yelled at by the Twitter guy, when you can come to the desert and start launching things yourself?

Our Spaceport could also be a boon for local STEM education. For example, did you know the "big spinny ring chair" is actually called an “Aerotrim”? Look, we’re already learning!

To make this a reality we don’t need a lot of money. We need a handful of people interested in space. People willing to do the non-spacey things like submit for permits and Google, “illegal launch a rocket if not scientist?” or “helium store near me.”

If that sounds like you, shoot me an email. We can do this. Let’s create the best desert Spaceport since Mos Eisley.

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