

# Ready for Lift Off

A George Snow Scholarship Fund recipient's career is literally rocket science

Written by HANNAH SPENCE

*It's one thing to think you're doing a good job, and another thing when your manager says you're doing a good job, but it's a totally different thing when your colleagues have voted for you."*

—Ledlyne Heriscar-Vazquez

As consumers, we tend to take for granted what we buy. We don't consider every ingredient that went into a computer chip, or a box of cereal. But Ledlyne Heriscar-Vazquez has made a career of doing just that.

"I verify and validate requirements," she says. "Like, if your manager told you to go to the grocery store and get cereal that contains such-and-such amount of vitamin D that is made with no gluten and has honey clusters, right? So your stakeholder gives you a set of requirements on the particular detail that you need for that particular item. Your team designed that item; somebody has to go forward and make sure that it is tested and is operating how the stakeholder wants it."

Only she is validating rockets instead of breakfast items.

And she works for none other than NASA.

For the past 17 years, the Olympic Heights High School graduate has been working out of the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, 13 of them with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Heriscar-Vazquez's contributions included the Space Shuttle program until its dissolution in 2011, and a current focus on the Artemis mission, which expects to land the first woman and the first person of color on the lunar surface.

In 2020, Heriscar-Vazquez earned the distinction of Employee of the Year in her department, one of three honors she has accrued since 2018.

"I wasn't doing my work

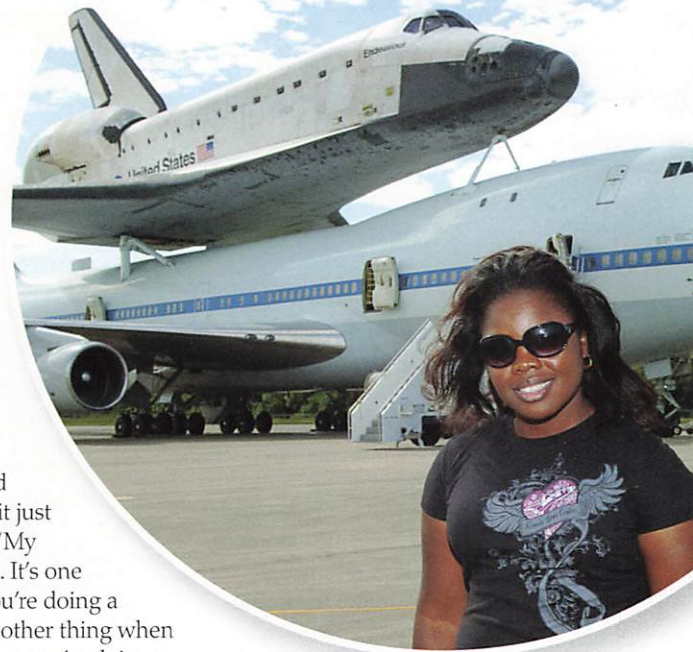
because I wanted the recognition; it just came," she says. "My colleagues voted. It's one thing to think you're doing a good job, and another thing when your manager says you're doing a good job, but it's a totally different thing when your colleagues have voted for you."

The road to becoming an engineer may have started inadvertently when Heriscar-Vazquez, the daughter of Haitian immigrants, was bused from Delray where the family lived to a Boca high school to advance integration efforts.

Landing at Olympic Heights High School, Heriscar-Vazquez joined an after-school science club called SECME (Southeastern Consortium of Minorities in Engineering), chaperoned by a teacher with an interest in helping minority students. SECME sparked a love of science, complemented by a teacher who opened even more doors, submitting Heriscar-Vazquez for a summer program at Florida A&M.

"When I got to FAMU, my whole perspective about engineering changed," she says. "The program involved sleeping in the dorms and getting a taste of college life." And on the weekends, she visited different area industries, including Johnson & Johnson, excursions that gave her the opportunity to meet practicing engineers, including some that "looked and talked" like her.

During her junior year at Olympic Heights, Heriscar-Vazquez attended a presentation by Tim Snow about his family's George



Ledlyne Heriscar-Vazquez

Snow Scholarship Fund. "He gave a wonderful speech about scholarships, encouraging us to apply," she recalls.

Both Vazquez and her twin sister applied, and both received scholarships.

"The crazy thing about Mr. Snow is that my father used to work at the Delray Beach Club when we were babies. On scholarship night, we ended up finding out that Mr. Snow was actually one of my dad's supervisors. Divinely, he had been connected to our family longer than we had ever known."

Heriscar-Vazquez went on to attend the University of Central Florida, where she happened to attend a Minority Advisory Industry Board networking event. She met a representative from United Space Alliance, NASA's chief subcontractor at Kennedy Space Center, and landed a job there. Four years later she was accepted at NASA. Now 40, Heriscar-Vazquez is happily married with two sons, ages 2 and 5.

When asked what's next, Vazquez replies, "I don't know. And I never know. I just take it one day at a time. One thing I can say is that I don't think women should miss out on opportunities. And don't size yourself up [against] the next man."