Home for the Holidays for Boeing's International Space Station Team

For the first time in seven years, the men and women on Boeing's [NYSE:BA] International Space Station, or ISS, team will celebrate the Christmas holidays with their families.

"It's going to be a thrill and a bonus," said Heather Mann, a Boeing contract engineer and single mom. She is one of 160 employees assigned to the ISS team at Kennedy Space Center under the ISS Payload Integration contract that is managed by NASA Systems based in Houston. NASA Systems is a business unit of Boeing Integrated Defense Systems and is NASA's prime contractor on the ISS program.

With the space station nearing "core complete" and the program on schedule, Boeing managers decided to give their ISS employees the Christmas week off for the first time since 1995.

Mann and her co-workers had almost given up hope. "Up until last year, we didn't know that Boeing had Christmas off," said Mark Beasley, a Boeing engineering assembly lead, whose Christmas week was usually spent assembling parts for the space station instead of toys for his son.

"It's a great privilege to work on something greater than ourselves," said David Bethay, director of ISS Operations. "Something we really believe in and own. It becomes a part of the team to see it through to the end."

The Mann family will join the Christmas travel exodus, heading up the Florida coast to celebrate in St. Augustine. Mark Beasley is taking his son, Evan, to New Orleans.

However, David Bethay, boasting a long NASA family lineage, says he's sticking close to home. "They'll appreciate having me for sixteen days", he said. And then he joked, "By then, they'll be ready to get rid of me".

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