

Shuttle doctor's down-to-earth approach

By WILL KOTEFF
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If a sense of humor counts for anything at NASA these days, Dr. Roberta Bondar should have no problem securing herself a seat on a shuttle flight.

"It doesn't even have to be the first one," Bondar told an audience at Erindale Campus last week, referring to the first flight for a Canadian astronaut. "I'm not fussy."

As one of six Canadians from a field of 4,300 who exhibited enough of the "Right Stuff" to become one of this country's first astronauts-in-training, Bondar doesn't have to be fussy. Her abilities have already been formally recognized and rewarded.

She made the cut several times to reach the elite six and have a shot at one of the two spots being held open for Canadian astronauts on shuttle flights during the next couple of years. To get there she survived an exhausting series of physical and mental testing, and a microscopic scrutiny of qualifications. Those qualifications, and an impressive academic record, including degrees from four universities, measured up to the examination and, combined with her personality and wit, made for an unbeatable and, obviously, irresistible combination in the eyes of the selection committee.

Associated with the University of Toronto's Mississauga campus since 1971, Bondar was one of the first researchers at Erindale. And last week she came home for a brief visit.

It was one more stop on an increasingly hectic public speaking/interview schedule. And the title of her talk was, "Spaced Out" because "that's the way I feel," Bondar explained.

The 37-year-old PhD's own research work

involves studies of the effect of high blood pressure on vision as well as studies of eye movements, which ties in very neatly with NASA's concern about space sickness and balance. So Bondar, or one of the other trainees, will be working on the Space Adaptation Syndrome Experiment on the shuttle.

Asked if she had any other personal goals during a shuttle flight, Bondar replied, "Besides doing the cartwheels I could never do in gym class?"

Aided by a slide and film presentation, the former Erindalian ran through an outline of the Canadian space program and touched on the subject of space sickness.

Coping with a defective slide projector, Bondar kept her audience informed and entertained for an hour and clearly demonstrated that while her credentials are impressive the new breed of astronaut is very down-to-earth.

Early in her talk she referred to the shuttle as "a very beautiful machine." And near the end of the slide presentation she put up one full view of the shuttle, paused, looked at it for a second, then simply said, "I just like that one."