

E Week: United Launch Alliance Tour

*By Michael Dunning and Ken Philippart
Image courtesy of Michael Dunning*

The Greater Huntsville Section sponsored its second tour this section year of the United Launch Alliance (ULA) plant in Decatur during Engineers Week (E Week). Section member Michael Dunning arranged the tour of the facility, one of only two ULA locations worldwide for manufacturing, assembly and integration operations.

Seventeen members and one guest, Decatur Mayor Don Kyle, registered for the tour. Mayor Kyle, unfortunately, had to drop out at the last minute due to pressing city council business but the remainder of the group proceeded as planned.

Craig Langford, ULA Vice President of Production Operations, welcomed the AIAA members. After a brief introduction, he turned the tour over to ULA representatives Anton Kolomiets and Michelle Knox. After a short safety briefing, they began the tour with a multimedia overview depicting ULA's launch vehicles and operations through videos, posters and models.



The group then entered the plant, starting where raw materials were brought in and processed into airframe panels and continuing through vehicle assembly, integration and associated processes. The tour culminated with observation of a completed launch vehicle on its transporter, almost ready to roll out for shipping to the launch site. An added bonus was the opportunity to tour the facility's underground tunnel network, designed for unhindered movement of parts throughout the plant.

Tired from walking over a mile but much more knowledgeable about launch vehicle production, the group returned to where the tour began for a group picture. Section Chair Ken Philippart presented Anton and Michelle with coveted section challenge coins to recognize them for providing an interesting tour. The group must have made a good impression since Michelle subsequently joined AIAA.

The Greater Huntsville Section thanks our tour guides Anton and Michelle and ULA for supporting AIAA and E Week and allowing our members to gain better insight into the launch vehicle industry.