

# Space industry salutes JSC Director Mike Coats

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Both the old and the new came together Friday night to honor Johnson Space Center Director Michael Coats on the space community's grandest night of the year - the 26th annual RNASA Gala.

The former astronaut and space shuttle commander was presented the Rotary National Award for Space Achievement for his many contributions to the industry by two long-time space luminaries - former NASA Administrator Mike Griffin and former Kennedy Space Center Director Bill Parsons.

Griffin is now a professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville and Parson is CEO of RD Amross, a company that markets rocket engines.

But beforehand, the keynote address was given by the vice

president of a company that hopes to play a key role in space in the future, Mark Sirangelo of Sierra Nevada Space Systems.

Emcee Elliott Pulham, Space Foundation CEO who filled in for Miles O'Brien introduced-Griffin and Parsons. "One is considered one of the smartest guys in the business, and the other is one of the most handsome. Ill let you decide which is which."

The crowd loved it.

The emcee also introduced Sirangelo after noting that 2011 had been a "phenomenal year in space," pointing out that "the space industry grew 12.2 percent last year and most of that growth came in the commercial sector."

Sirangelo agreed. "The idea that the space industry is dead is so off base," he told the black-tie crowd of about 900 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Houston.

## JUST BEGINNING

"Space is just beginning to start its next phase," he said, going on to praise the shuttle program and the International Space Station.

"I think the station will go on to become one of the most amazing achievements of mankind. Many experiments are going on up there, and things that will come out of that will change our lives forever.

"My mission is to enable us to get back to the ISS in an ongoing basis. I like the Russians but think we ought to put the Russians back in second place."

## MAYOR WELCOMES CROWD

Houston Mayor Annise Parker and RNASA Foundation Chairman Rodolfo Gonzalez welcomed guests to the event and the Rev. Steve Oglesbee, pastor of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church

gave the invocation.

"I'm a big fan of Mike Coats," the mayor said, "I can't image a more worthy recipient of the National Space Trophy.

"Johnson Space Center is Houston, and Houston is Johnson Space Center," she continued, getting some of the loudest applause of the evening.

"All of us who grew up here in Houston with the dream of space, and the fact that the Johnson Space Center was in our back yard, and for those of us who support the U.S. space program, and revere its accomplishments, mourn the tragedies, and hope for the future, I'm truly happy to be here.



Photo by MARY ALYS CHERRY/The Citizen

National Space Trophy winner Michael Coats, center, shows off the award to the crowd at the RNASA Gala Friday night as his presenters, former NASA Administrator Michael Griffin, left, and former Kennedy Space Center Director Bill Parsons, look on.