

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI FOUNDATION

collegian 2025



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From Montana to the moon

MSU professor and alum Brock LaMeris and his students sent a radiation-resistant computer to the moon, proving Bobcats can compete and shine on a global stage.



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From Montana to the Moon

BY HANNAH STIFF

"My name is Brock LaMeris and I'm writing to you from the year 2022. I live in the beautiful town of Bozeman, Montana, located on the North American continent of planet Earth. I am the fortunate one in charge of the project that built this computer that you just opened. This computer was built by students and faculty from Montana State University. We call this computer 'RadPC' because it can operate in the presence of space radiation. More about that later..."

Those were the words MSU electrical and computer engineering professor Brock LaMeris '98, recorded and saved on the computer he sent to space earlier this year. The RadPC he mentioned is a small, radiation-resistant computer LaMeris created and refined over several decades with the help of many MSU students and professors. RadPC not only made it to outer space, it was part of a NASA mission to deliver a lander to the moon and leave behind remnants of life on earth.

The mission that carried RadPC and other payloads to the moon was named Blue Ghost and was conducted by the Texas-based company Firefly Aerospace. Commissioned by NASA, the landing is historic for several reasons. The March 2, 2025, touchdown was the first fully successful commercial moon landing. Once on the moon's surface, Blue Ghost then completed more than 14 days of surface operations, maximizing 346 hours of daylight and 5 hours of operations that ran into the lunar night. The multi-day endeavor marks the longest commercial operations on the moon to date.

The program that sent RadPC to space is part of NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative

and Artemis campaign. Blue Ghost carried cargo from renowned educational institutions like Johns Hopkins University and Boston University, inventive companies like Aegis Aerospace, and from NASA.

That a computer created by MSU staff and students also made the historic voyage to the moon is a source of pride for the entire state of Montana and Bobcats young and old. But LaMeris said he wasn't surprised his students were able to deliver on such a huge project.

"It's awesome to see that we pulled it off," LaMeris said. "MSU students did this. Of course they did."

Long before the lunar landing, LaMeris and his students completed rigorous testing of the RadPC over several years. First they tested it on a dozen balloon flights, then they moved to rockets before RadPC flew aboard multiple satellites and eventually earned entry to the International Space Station three different times.

"Then we got the big call," LaMeris said.

The call was from NASA, informing LaMeris that RadPC was one of 10 NASA payloads headed to the moon. LaMeris and his students were elated, and ready. In the preparation leading up to the January 2025 mission,



The RadPC was developed over a number of years with rigorous testing that included three trips to the International Space Station, and eventually, the moon. Photo by Tyson Krinke

LaMeres remembers his students needed to shake off the nervousness of joining calls with NASA personnel. While RadPC was made in Montana, a state some likely still can't place on a map, LaMeres knew all along that his students could compete on a national level.

"We're teaching the same stuff they're teaching at the big schools," LaMeres said. "Our students are just as good as their students. Our students are hardworking and hands on and companies love that."

So when they prepared alongside juggernaut institutions, MSU shone bright.

"When they got on a design review call with NASA and it was their time to talk, they talked like an equal," LaMeres said. "I was really proud of them."

RadPC and the time capsule information it contains will remain on the moon. Hypothetically, if someone lands on the moon in 100, 1,000, or even more years and they find the small computer, they will have access to rich information about what life was like in Montana in 2022, when LaMeres first penned his letter. LaMeres and team loaded the computer with messages from then President Waded Cruzado, school children (who shared messages like, "Say hi to my dog!"), Montana elected officials, students, and of course, LaMeres himself. In his 1,764-word missive that lives on the moon, LaMeres paints a picture of life in current times as both challenging and filled with promise. He talks about how technology has made life easier for humans while also creating new problems to tackle.

Though the moon landing is a standout moment of LaMeres' career, he is excited for what's ahead. When he's not teaching or researching or home with his two daughters and wife JoAnn '17, LaMeres is building his fledgling company, Resilient Computing. The company, focused

on providing ultra-reliable computer architecture, is a spinout from his work at MSU. LaMeres was able to transfer his research and inventions to his company so he could commercialize the academic work he completed over his decades at MSU. LaMeres calls Resilient Computing proof that "research at MSU can be rapidly translated" to new products and services for the private sector.

His first company employees are both former MSU Ph.D. students, which is a point of pride for LaMeres.

"I'd love to be a company that employs MSU grads so they can stay here in Montana and not have to leave the state," he said.

While continuing to juggle endless priorities, LaMeres is clear about his most important career contribution.

"My real contribution is that I can help people become great engineers," he said. "All I do is mentor the students and show them how to do it."

It's a contribution that others are noticing as well. The American Society for Engineering Education awarded LaMeres the society's prestigious National Outstanding Teaching Award for 2025. Todd Kaiser, head of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at MSU, nominated LaMeres for the award because of his work to modernize the university's computer engineering curriculum.

Former MSU President Waded Cruzado described LaMeres as "an outstanding educator and most deserving of this recognition." Kaiser said he "couldn't think of anyone more deserving" of national recognition than LaMeres. Brett Gunnink, Dean of the Norm Asbjornson College of Engineering said, "when it comes to instruction, LaMeres is among MSU's finest." From his chair, LaMeres said he's grateful for the award because teaching has always meant



Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander, with RadPC on board, captured footage of the Moon during its third lunar orbit on February 24, 2025. The photo was captured about 100 km above the lunar surface, showing the far side of the Moon and a top-down view of Blue Ghost's thrusters. Photo courtesy Firefly Aerospace

"The magic really happens when students come through my classes to learn about computers and then work in my research lab and figure out how to actually 'use' them to do cutting-edge stuff. That's how my team was able to put a computer on the moon."

— Brock LaMeres



Photo by Tyson Krimke



Brock LaMeris discusses components of the RadPC with electrical engineering master's student Ben Macht '24 and doctoral candidate Tristan Running Crane '21. Photo by Tyson Krinke

more to him than talking in front of a whiteboard to students who are required to take his class.

"This award is a huge honor for me because it is meant to recognize teaching in all forms at a university," LaMeris said. "When we think about teaching, we usually think about a professor lecturing in a classroom. But I spend as much time working with students in my research lab as I do lecturing in the classroom. The magic really happens when students come through my classes to learn about computers and then work in my research lab and figure out how to actually 'use' them to do cutting-edge stuff. That's how my team was able to put a computer on the moon."

In addition to teaching, authoring five textbooks and running a startup, LaMeris has published over 100 papers on digital systems and been granted 16 U.S. patents related to computer technology, including three for RadPC. He also has a growing YouTube channel where he shares his expertise on everything from how to change a fuse in your car to how to build a robot. Today, four core classes in the electrical and computer engineering department at MSU use textbooks authored by LaMeris.

While LaMeris may get to share his knowledge with students on campus, he's especially proud of the students in his life: his daughters Alexis and Kylie. LaMeris boasts about both daughters being 4.0 students at Bozeman High School. On MSU's campus, Alexis is studying computer science, which obviously makes LaMeris beam. Kylie is considering nursing and LaMeris is pushing hard for her to choose MSU. In the fall, as Alexis enters her sophomore

year at MSU and Kylie begins her senior year at Bozeman High, LaMeris will begin his 20th year of teaching at MSU. Even with his new company, LaMeris said he's committed to his students.

"I have no plans to stop teaching," he said. "I always tell everyone, 'There's amazing stuff going on at MSU and most of the time it's people from Montana doing it.'"

Amazing stuff like building a space-worthy computer in MSU classrooms and laboratories and the students who are educated at Montana's land-grant university that will go on to solve challenging problems and work with world-changing institutions. LaMeris has no doubt that the days ahead are bright. It's a message he believes so deeply, he memorialized it.

"As you look at the beautiful blue ball called Earth from the surface of the moon, you should also know that I for one believe that we will 'make it,'" LaMeris wrote. "I believe this because at our core, humans are good. Our race has a built-in instinct to protect and nurture those that are in need. Even the toughest among us will drop everything they are doing if they see a child or elderly person that needs help."

LaMeris' final sentences in his time capsule letter that lives on the moon's surface are reflective of how he lives his life. If there is hope for humankind, it's thanks to the kind of humans that dedicate their lives to others — at home, in the workplace, in the classroom and beyond. LaMeris closes out his moon message with something he's known to say regularly in his classes, "Life is good." 🐾