

# Kosher food will cross final frontier

By Lisa J. Huriash  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Kosher food is about to boldly go where no such meals have gone before.

In NASA's 40 years of space flight, some astronauts have been Jewish — such as Judith Resnick, who died in the Challenger shuttle explosion in 1986, and David Wolf, who just returned from the Endeavour flight. But no one had



Col. Ilan Ramon

requested kosher food — until now.

Col. Ilan Ramon, 47, from Tel Aviv, Israel, who is training for a U.S. space shuttle mission devoted to an international research project, will be the first to keep kosher in space. He's expected to fly next year.

"I told them I wanted kosher food, and they told me they'd have to check it out because nobody until today has asked them for kosher food," Ramon said by telephone from Houston, where he has been training at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center since 1998.

Ramon is not particularly religious but realizes that as Israel's first astronaut, "I'm kind of representative of all the Jewish community."

Rabbis were ecstatic when they heard that NASA could accommodate Ramon's request.

"This is one small step for Col. Ramon, but a large step for Jews worldwide," said Rabbi Yossie Denburg of Coral Springs, Fla.

Ramon, a member of the Israeli air force, is the son of a German immigrant and a mother who survived the Nazis' Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland.

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Holocaust organizations, and for these people, it's more than a miracle," he said. "After all they've been through, to see an Israeli astronaut, it's very exciting."

*Kosher* is a Hebrew word that means "proper" or "fit," and it is used for food prepared according to Jewish dietary and religious laws. Meat and dairy products may not be mixed, and certain foods, such as pork or shellfish, are prohibited. Meat animals must be killed without suffering, and their flesh must be prepared in certain ways.

To accommodate Ramon, NASA contacted My Own Meals, a company in Deerfield, Ill., that sells certified kosher food in "thermostabilized" sealed pouches, said Vickie Kloeris, the space agency's system manager for food. The pouches are intended primarily for campers.

The company also has sold kosher food directly to U.S. soldiers since 1993, said Joe D'Onofrio, chief financial officer. In 1996, the military started buying the meals for all service members requesting them.

Of 10 kosher choices, Ramon picked five: Florentine lasagna, beef stew, chicken Mediterranean, My Kind of Chicken (which the company describes as chunks of light and dark chicken with brown rice, peas and carrots) and Old World Stew (beef with brown rice, zucchini, pinto beans and flavors of the Middle East), Kloeris said.

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