

Associated Press article printed in the Lafayette Journal and Courier mentioning Purdue School of Aeronautics and Astronautics students David Spencer and Bob Mase, printed 10/19/01

NASA confident as Odyssey nears Mars

By Robert Jablon

The Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — The 2001 Mars Odyssey spacecraft is on target to orbit the Red Planet next week and erase the stigma of back-to-back mission failures, NASA officials said Thursday.

“I expect nothing less than a buffy-eye the night of Oct. 23” when the spacecraft fires its main thruster and slips into orbit, said

David A. Spencer, Odyssey’s mission manager, at a press conference at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

With major course corrections completed, Odyssey was less than 2 million miles from Mars. Its path may need only to be “tweaked” before it begins orbiting 386 miles above the planet’s north pole, said lead navigator Bob Mase.

Odyssey would join the Mars Global Surveyor, a robotic probe that began mapping the planet in 1999.

Launched in April, Odyssey’s \$297 million mission is to map chemicals and minerals that make up the Martian surface, seek out hidden reservoirs of water and assess radiation risks to future human missions. The spacecraft will also serve as a communications relay satellite for American and international spacecraft in 2003 and 2004.

Its mission follows the losses in 1999 of NASA’s Mars Climate Orbiter and the Mars Polar Lander. The lander crashed into the Martian surface; the orbiter burnt up in the planet’s atmosphere.

Roger Gibbs, Odyssey’s deputy project manager, said the failures prompted extensive testing and analysis.

“Every test, every question has been done and answered,” he said.