

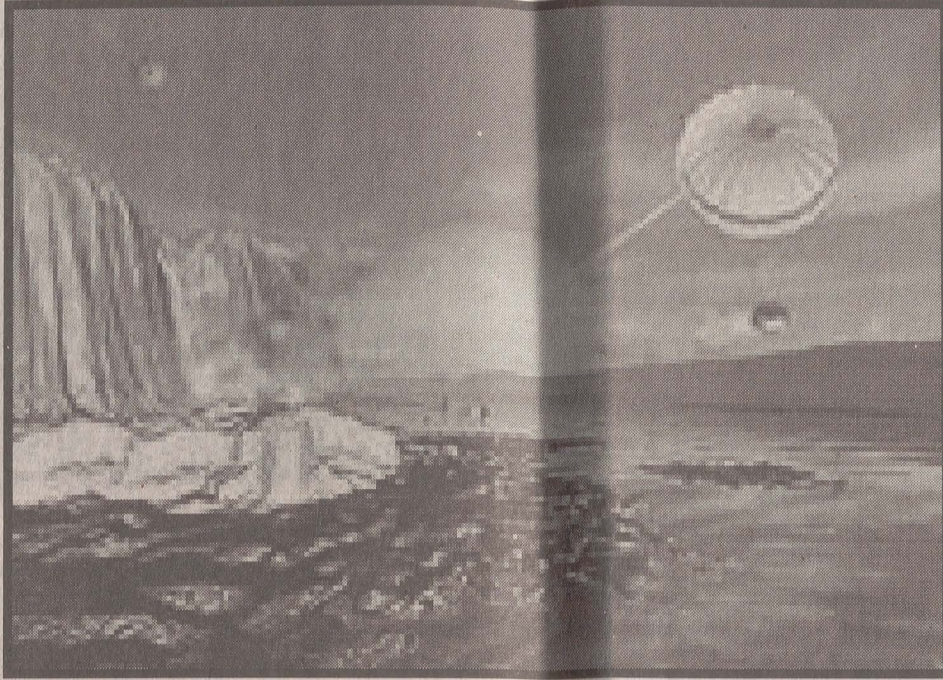
## We've landed on a Moon!

By David Rude  
Staff Writer

On Friday, January 14, 2005, after a seven-year trip through the black of space, the European Space Agency's Huygens probe successfully descended through the frozen atmosphere of Saturn's largest moon, Titan, and landed on its surface.

At a time when it's the norm to hitch a piggy-back ride to space for cost-efficiency, the Huygens probe was launched along with the Cassini voyager on October 15, 1997. While Cassini's mission was to fly to Saturn and study its rings, Huygens' mission was to study Titan's atmosphere and clouds and to characterize Titan's surface on a regional scale.

Why Titan? One reason is that Titan is a large moon in our outer solar system that is remarkably like a planet in our inner solar system. Also, the conditions and gases in Titan's atmosphere are similar to those of our Pre-Cambrian Earth. Like Titan's atmosphere now, Earth's early atmosphere contained gases that would be toxic to us. Nevertheless, it was in this period that life first appeared on Earth. Not only does this swing the door open to study how our



An artist's rendering of what the landing might look like (photo courtesy spacedaily.com)

planet formed, but Titan is a goldmine of natural resources for our future generations.

"Space exploration gives us the opportunity to explore space in ways that are obviously impossible from Earth," said

Tom Gougeon, Physics and Astronomy instructor at ACC, and planetarium technician at Jesse Besser Museum. "From such explorations, we are learning about the origin, evolution and ultimate fate of our universe. Studying Titan up close may give us some insight as to what the Earth may have been like in its infancy, since

Titan is the only moon in the solar system with an appreciable atmosphere."

While Huygens studies Titan, Cassini will remain nearby for now, orbiting around Saturn and relaying data from Huygens.

Cassini is the largest unmanned interplanetary vessel ever built by NASA. Unable to launch directly to Saturn with the inefficient propulsion systems at the time, NASA sent Cassini and Huygens on a "gravity assist trajectory" - the vessel flew to Venus, made two orbits, shot back to Earth in 1999, used Earth's orbit to sling it to Jupiter, and so on

to Saturn.

Cassini orbited Saturn twice while setting up for the piggy-back probe's deployment, and on Christmas day, 2004, Huygens launched from Cassini and traveled twenty days to Titan.

Huygens entered Titan's atmosphere at about 5:15 a.m. EST Friday morning, and descended for two and one-half hours. After a heated entry, a sequence of parachutes slowed it down while the probe's scientific instruments were exposed to test the atmosphere. The probe landed with an impact that would be consid-

## African village to welcome ACC students

By David Rude  
Staff Writer

The students of an ACC class, Great Books on Leadership, are planning a trip to Gambia this spring, to the village of Njawara, which will benefit the villagers of this severely impoverished community.

The students will be staying for two weeks in Gambia, helping with various needed errands, such as helping with irrigation or planting food crops.

"The villagers of Njawara desperately need our help, and they will appreciate anything our Alpena students can offer. Likewise, our students need help in raising the money to travel and stay in Gambia," said Tom Ray, instructor of Great Books on Leadership.

The class needs to raise approximately \$40,000, and the money must be generated before May.

There will be a donation canister in the ACC Library, and elsewhere in the community.

"Please help in any way you can. Help make the trip a success. Your own personal reward will be knowing that you helped students of Alpena learn, and helped the villagers of Njawara smile," said Ray.

For more information, contact Tom Ray at rayt@alpenacc.edu.

## Who truly benefits in President Bush's proposed Social Security reform?

By Erinn Kane  
Staff Writer

President George Bush has truly taken consideration of Americas plunging social security system by being the first president ever to propose a possible alternative system. Since election, Bush has announced his idea for our "supposed" retirement funding. The plan is to either keep our Social Security (abbreviated SS) plan existing presently, or to divert 2% from our already taxed 12.4% directly into a private investment account. The 2% taxed is predicted to gain substantial interest over the course of each workers lifetime, so much interest that the retiree would not even need any other SS aid to support their retirement. On his SS speech President Bush quotes, "Owning your own personal savings account allows you to pass on your savings to whom ever you choose, and at the same time, manage your own account."

So the real question is what is the problem with the SS system? Every worker sees approximately three bucks auto-

matically deducted from their paychecks weekly, depending on how much money made. That money is used in gov't spending, expanding the federal deficit. That SS tax is guaranteed from the gov't to be paid back when we retire. The problem today is the gov't is in debt 413 billion dollars! What guarantee can any American trust from such a wealth-depleted gov't as ours? The answer is, we can't trust our gov't with our money. It's predicted that only 13 years from now, the gov't will begin to disburse more in SS than it gains, obviously increasing our federal deficit. The "present social security plan will only guarantee to pay retirees until 2042, then it will be bankrupt," says Bernie Wasow, an economist for Century Foundation. Americans age 18-40 have a serious problem rousing, and without action, we can all kiss our dream retirement vacations goodbye.

The reality is, if we don't either update the SS system, or structure a completely different one, our generation as well as two ahead will pay \$10.4 trillion

according to Fox News Channel. Considering that our national debt is currently 413 billion, 10.4 trillion is insupportable, and undoubtedly ridiculous to comprehend. This is precisely why a new SS retirement funding must transpire.

When President Roosevelt conducted the SS system over six decades ago, the economy was reasonably contrary to as it is presently. According to the White House, for every retiree half a century ago there were at sixteen workers supporting their SS benefits. Today, merely three workers support each retiree. The loss in workers is astonishing. Most agree the loss in workers supporting each retiree is on account of the drowning economy; yet, the baby-boomers are the ones to blame. With increasing numbers of baby-boomers retiring, and families having fewer children, there are obviously fewer workers to support the each retiree. What is the solution? The payroll tax is already at 12.4%! If we are to keep the current system instead of reform, in order for

us to retire, the payroll tax will be raised to 18% says the White House. Another option is to elevate the retirement age from the already extended sixty-seven to sixty-nine, allowing people to receive retirement funding five years before they are expected to die! Obviously, these answers, if executed, will merely delay the inevitable problem of SS for a decade or two, but what will the government do then?

With the depressing voter turnout in this election, it is quite obvious that most Americans do not worry nor care for these future enigmas of SS. The generation that will be affected worse is the group whom produced the least voter turnout. Tim Kuehnlein, a professor of American politics at ACC, agrees that the "Government has a major crisis; this becomes an issue of whether people want to take care of themselves; not everyone can take care of themselves."

Surprisingly, the proposed plan has failed to energize most politicians. Most democrats especially argue that this plan will be costly and have little

effect on the pending SS problem. In all actuality though, most democrats disprove of this plan because the government would lose 2% of the total SS money they depend on for federal disbursements. With this plan, 10% of our SS money will stay in the current system while 2% is diverted into private investment accounts that gain mad interest. "Opponents maintain private investment accounts would alter the intent of Social Security, possibly harm beneficiaries, and widen federal budget deficits," writes Pamela Gaynor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Truthfully, the federal deficit is already outrageously out of control, and the gov't is still spending our SS money, hence, guaranteeing our SS dependent retirees that their retirement funding will be provided with money the gov't cannot afford.

So why is it such a difficult decision? If the present system is a failure for our generation, modification should occur. According to a new poll on Fox News Opinion Dynamics, 60% Americans supported giving people the choice to privately invest 2% of their SS tax. Regardless of partisan differences, 53% Democrats and 71% Republicans like the

new personal investment option, which makes sense; half of Congress currently has private investment accounts for their retirement, so why wouldn't more than half Americas politicians prefer the plan? "Young workers who elect personal accounts can expect to receive far higher rate of return on their money than the current system could ever afford to pay them," said vice president Dick Cheney at Catholic University America.

Are you not convinced yet? Do you still believe that our countries present SS system is workable? The baby-boom generation is ending, meaning more people are retiring than working. The present SS system is eventually going to fail, "it makes sense to try and get a better rate of return on our money if we expect there to be a social security fund," says Bush. Since many people in our generation plan to be wealthy fifty years from now, I have to say, President Bush, I could not agree any more on this one.