Narrator: Welcome to Kennedy NOW! A look at some of the recent accomplishments and changes under way at America's premiere spaceport.

NASA Launch Services Program, based at Kennedy, is working toward the summer launch of the agency's newest space-based observatory.

Called IRIS, the 7-foot-long spacecraft will use a spectrograph to see the way energy moves through the outer layers of the sun and into its shining corona.

In late April the spacecraft arrived at Vandenberg Air Force Base in Calif. where technicians and LSP managers began the final steps of processing it for launch in June.

IRIS will fly into space aboard a Pegasus rocket, which will be dropped from a converted L-1011 airliner before igniting its engine to reach orbit.

Another target came into focus for Kennedy, and its unique work force, in April.

That's when NASA outlined an ambitious exploration mission aimed at sending astronauts to sample an asteroid as it flies through space.

Dan Dumbacher, Deputy Assoc. Admin. for Exploration Systems Development: We are thrilled with this mission,
we look forward to it, it will be a challenge, it will be complex.

But NASA is up to the challenge and the team that you see represented here is ready and willing to take it on.

Narrator: The asteroid will be captured by a solar-electric-powered, un-crewed spacecraft and placed into a stable orbit.

A human crew flying aboard an Orion spacecraft launched from Kennedy will visit the asteroid.

They'll take samples from it that researchers will use to further their studies of the space rocks.

The Orion flight, launching on a Space Launch System super-booster now under development,

could take place as soon as 2021.

The Orion design will be tested next year during an un-crewed mission using a spacecraft

now being assembled inside Kennedy's Operations & Checkout Building.

Bob Cabana, Kennedy Space Center Director: We've made tremendous progress in our transition to the future.

Narrator: The flight test will send the Orion spacecraft about 3,600 miles above Earth,

or some 15 times higher than the International Space Station. From that height,

it will plunge into the atmosphere at more than 20,000 mph to test the spacecraft's heat shield.
While the mission is a demanding test of the spacecraft, it also will provide proof of

Kennedy's expertise in continuing to build and launch spacecraft destined for unique and important exploration goals.

That's Kennedy Now!