

## Shatner's Crew Mate on Space Trip Dies in Plane Crash

Glen de Vries was one of three people who joined the former “Star Trek” star on a Blue Origin flight last month.

By Ed Shanahan

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A month after traveling to space and back aboard a Blue Origin rocket, a 49-year-old software executive was killed on Thursday when a single-engine plane he was traveling in crashed in a wooded section of northern New Jersey, officials said.

The executive, Glen de Vries of Manhattan, was one of two people to die in the crash, the New Jersey State Police said. The second, Thomas P. Fischer, 54, of Hopatcong, N.J., was the owner and head instructor at a family-owned New Jersey flight school where Mr. de Vries had trained as a pilot, according to its website.

It was not immediately clear which man was piloting the plane when it went down.

“Our thoughts and support go out to Glen’s family,” a spokesman for the parent company of Medidata Solutions, the life sciences company that Mr. de Vries helped found, said in a statement. “His tireless energy, empathy and pioneering spirit left their mark on everyone who knew him.”



Investigators worked at the scene of a plane crash in New Jersey that killed two people on Thursday. Lori Comstock/New Jersey Herald, via USA Today Network

According to the State Police, troopers responded to a report of a plane crash in Sussex County shortly before 3 p.m. on Thursday.

The plane, a Cessna 172, had left Essex County Airport in Caldwell, N.J., and was bound for Sussex Airport when it went down in a wooded area of a state park near Lake Kemah in Hampton Township, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. The crash site is about 12 miles from Sussex Airport.

The aviation administration said in a statement that it was investigating the crash with the National Transportation Safety Board, which is leading the inquiry.

Messages seeking comment from Mr. Fischer’s flight school, Fischer Aviation, were not immediately answered.

In October, Mr. de Vries, a molecular biologist by training, flew to the edge of space for a few minutes with William Shatner, the former “Star Trek” star, and two others as Blue Origin’s second New Shepard crew.

“We are devastated to hear of the sudden passing of Glen de Vries,” Blue Origin wrote in a statement posted on Twitter. “He brought so much life and energy to the entire Blue Origin team and to his fellow crewmates. His passion for aviation, his charitable work, and his dedication to his craft will long be revered and admired.”

Jeff Bezos, Blue Origin’s owner, posted a separate message on Instagram, saying that Mr. de Vries was “a visionary and an innovator — a true leader.”

Mr. de Vries had used his heightened platform as Mr. Shatner's crew mate to call attention to environmental issues and to promote humanitarian causes like increasing access to drinking water for communities that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change — a cause to which he had donated \$1 million shortly before his trip to space.

In an interview after the flight with Carnegie Mellon University, where he was a trustee, Mr. de Vries said it had been a unique pleasure to make the ride with Mr. Shatner.

"He's an actor and musician and has spent his career working on expressing emotion," Mr. de Vries said. "Being on this trip with someone like that — who could help us really think about how to articulate and express the experience ourselves — was a real privilege."

The views of Earth during the brief New Shepard flight, he said, gave him a "heightened sense of time in my mind starting from the countdown."

"I think I've taken that perspective back down with me to our planet, and into my relationships," he said. "The passage of time, just like the resources on Earth, feels more precious with expanded perspective."

In the interview, Mr. de Vries — who devoured books about rockets, aircraft and spaceships as a child — also discussed what was in his head as the final 10 seconds counted down before liftoff.

"I had this thought of a photograph my mom found, this old picture of me launching a model rocket," he said. "I don't know how old I was, under 10. That was in my head. I'm on the rocket, not watching the rocket. It's a real rocket. Not a model rocket."

Asked whether he was interested in making a return trip, he did not hesitate to answer in the affirmative.

"I honestly don't think anybody could go to space and not want to go to space more," he said.

Joey Roulette and Ashley Wong contributed reporting.

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