SPACE

NASA readies for one try at Mars landing

By Eric Berger

NASA is going for gold early on Monday with its efforts to land a 1-ton rover on the surface of Mars.

“We’re all going to stick the landing, right guys?” Doug McCuistion, director of the Mars Exploration Program at NASA headquarters in Washington, asked his engineers on Thursday.

Also there are no silver medals for the rover, named Curiosity. It either sticks the landing or NASA loses by far its largest, most powerful and scientifically equipped rover.

With less than three days to go before the planned landing, all is well.

“Our team is on track,” said Pete Theisinger, director of the Mars Science Laboratory mission. “It’s really quiet in my office right now.”

The key words are “right now,” because all the action is set for early Monday morning, seven minutes before the 12:17 a.m. EDT touchdown.

As the landing date nears, public interest has spiked, with this cer-Mars continues on A15-

Fugitives forced to go underground

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Houston Tango Blast, who is accused of leading a cocaine-trafficking organization. He was arrested in Mexico in May and has not yet been sent back to the United States.

As Madrigal roamed Mexico, presumably out of the reach of American authorities, pictures were posted on a MySpace page that showed him on the beach, soaking in a giant bathtub of bubbles and hanging out in nightclubs.

U.S. authorities confiscated an array of his expensive toys, including such luxury cars as a Bentley, Maserati, Hummer and BMW.

Houston Police Capt. Dale Brown, in charge of the Gang Division, said there are 10,000 documented gang members in Houston and the surrounding counties, and more than 200 gangs.

“There is a gang presence in basically every part of our city and surrounding counties,” he said. “There is no such thing as, gang members are only hanging out in the inner city. For years now they have spread out into the suburbs and rural areas.”

The public now has at their fingertips the wanted posters of Houston’s most sought gangsters on the law-enforcement website, stophouston gangs.org. They can, and have, left real-time tips leading police or federal agents right to fugitives.

Authorities in turn post status reports to let tipsters know what happened, including whether an arrest has been made or more help is needed.

As soon as one “Top Ten” fugitive is captured, another moves onto the list.

“When your picture is put up, and you are aware of it, it means you have to go underground,” said Karson, of the University of Houston-Downtown.

“Depending on the level of the criminal, it might be from someone moving out of the neighborhood or going on the road and living in campsites and hoping not to get spotted.”

Since mid-April, authorities at HPD, the FBI, and other agencies behind the website have single out one member of “Top Ten” for extreme online and billboard attention. Clear Channel Outdoor has donated spots on several billboards. Since the the Top 10 program was launched, visitors to the website, which includes a wealth of information on gangs, have soared, leaving 430 tips on gang activity in a recent 90-day period, authorities said.

Brown, the HPD captain, said people who previously have been hesitant to offer information on gang members due to fears of retaliation should find more comfort in the website’s anonymity.

“The public, the citizens, have the information we need to solve crimes, to identify the bad guys, to help locate and arrest them,” he said.

“Somebody out there knows who these people are.”

Online tipsters help take these seven of Houston’s most wanted off streets

By Dan Schiller

With an old-school idea and a few modern twists, most of Houston’s “Top Ten Most Wanted Gang Fugitives” have been captured within the past 100 days.

With their faces pushed through cyberspace and plastered on donated roadside billboards, the public was called on to anonymously go to their computers, smartphones or tablets to share online tips on the gangsters’ whereabouts.

And apparently they did. Six gangsters were nabbed in the Houston area, including reputed robbers and home invaders. An accused drug trafficker was apprehended in Mexico.

“It is social networking at its finest,” said Larry Karson, a retired Customs Service agent who is a criminal justice lecturer at the University of Houston-Downtown. “It is simply an extension from John Walsh’s ‘America’s Most Wanted,’ a continuation of it in the 21st century.”

Among the highest-profile fugitives to be captured is Raul Madrigal, affiliated with the

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