A few years out of college, Robert Rose, ’02, ’06, saw a video of the launch of a SpaceX rocket.

“I just got chills,” Rose said. “They had a video camera strapped to the bottom of a rocket that showed the entire launch sequence from launch to orbit. I watched it over and over and thought, ‘Wow — that is really neat.’”

Thus began his new career with the private, California-based company more commonly known as SpaceX, which has had several successful space missions, including two trips to the International Space Station just this year.

Rose didn’t always want to be a rocket scientist; he’s actually a software engineer. But he sent in an employment application the very night he watched the launch video, and his career projection changed.

He grew up in Corvallis, where his parents cultivated his scientific curiosity early.

“I was given my first computer at age four,” he said. “So I started programming really early on. That is what has sustained me for so long; it just doesn’t feel like work.”

His father, Robin Rose, is a forestry professor at OSU. Robert Rose would eventually earn OSU degrees in computer science, computer engineering and electrical and computer engineering. These led to internships and employment at Hewlett-Packard in Corvallis as well as a few years in Bend making PlayStation games for Sony.

He credits Professor Ron Metoyer with helping him focus his studies during his master’s program.

Once his imagination shot into the stratosphere and he signed on with SpaceX, he began designing programs to help rockets get where they need to go.

“The space station is in low-earth orbit,” Rose said. “What our company and others are trying to implement is making travel to lower orbit more routine and more of a service that NASA purchases, and not necessarily a system that they develop themselves. The purpose of the (current) trips is to take cargo to the station and back.

“The eventual goal is to put people on Dragon (the SpaceX spacecraft). We just got the contract to do that work. Hopefully in a couple of years we’ll have a demonstration with people on Dragon.”

Rose and his wife, Maria Hare Rose, ’05, have two boys. “You know those signs with an orange border in front of all the buildings on campus? She designed all those,” he said proudly of his graphic designer wife.

Rose met another OSU space alum recently at an awards ceremony at NASA; astronaut Don Pettit, ’78. Pettit was aboard the space station and operated the arm that grabbed the Dragon capsule during the test flight this past summer.

“Looks like we have a Dragon by the tail,” Pettit proclaimed at the time.

October brought the first successful resupply flight to support the extensive research experiments aboard the station. There are eleven more flights currently contracted with NASA — enough to keep Rose busy designing flight software for quite some time.

— Ann Kinkley