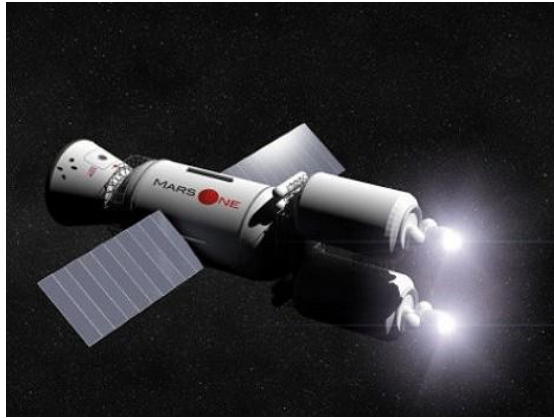


# Wanted: Small group to study space and travel to Mars. One way.

By Dallas Morning News, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.22.14  
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A model of the space vehicle similar to what Mars One hopes to launch into space with its crew aboard. Photo: Mars One



DALLAS — Like many 20-somethings, Cole Leonard has reached a professional crossroads: Should he pursue a safe career — or strive for a dream that may prove to be elusive?

But few of his peers face a choice as extreme as his, a choice between becoming a lawyer — or dying on the surface of Mars.

It's a difficult decision for the 27-year-old Plano, Texas, resident. Leonard has been accepted into law school at Texas Tech for the fall — but he is also one of 705 candidates vying to be part of the first human colony on Earth's neighbor.

The journey is being organized by Mars One, a nonprofit founded by a Dutch businessman who insists it can be accomplished with current technology. The group began soliciting applications from potential colonists last year, and more than 200,000 people from around the world have already signed up. The list will be whittled down to 24 by next year, organizers said.

## Space Living 101

Each colonist would undergo at least eight years of training. They'd learn about space travel and how to live on a planet with vicious dust storms, temperatures below minus 200 degrees and a lack of breathable air.

And there's this one big catch: The technology doesn't yet exist to launch a return flight — meaning, it would be a one-way trip for the colonists from Earth.

That sounds like a good deal to Leonard, though he doesn't much fit the bill of an astronaut. He works as an aide to Dallas County Commissioner Mike Cantrell. The job consists of writing position papers, maintaining Cantrell's website and brewing the occasional pot of coffee. Leonard doesn't have much training in flight, engineering, agriculture, medicine or any other skills helpful to sustaining life on another planet.

But in other ways, he says, he's perfect. He is young, healthy and single and has always been interested in space and science fiction. And, more importantly, he is deeply excited by the idea of exploring, and convinced of the need for humankind to broaden its horizons.

"For some reason, people think that exploration just ended when Columbus came over and found the West Indies," he said.

Plus, he would leave behind an identical twin on Earth. "I'm expendable," he said.

## \$6 Billion Excellent Adventure

Still, there's some hesitation. Leonard says he doesn't doubt Mars One's sincerity, but he needs to be convinced that the group can pull off its grand idea. Before leaving Earth, he'd need to know more about the technology and contingency plans — after all, he'd hate to run out of food or power or water 34 million miles from home.

Mars One officials declined to comment. Founder Bas Lansdorp, who made his fortune building a wind energy company, has estimated that it will cost \$6 billion to send the first group of four to Mars. He hopes to raise much of that through a worldwide reality television show, which would broadcast the training, the trip and the landing.

### **You're Joking, Right?**

Leonard has simpler worries, too. He can't study to become a lawyer and train to be an astronaut at the same time — and he's hesitant to give up law school for a dream that may not pan out. Plus, he'd miss music and simple, everyday things like relaxing outdoors on a patio. There are still lots of places on Earth he hasn't seen — and, of course, there's his family, who don't want him to go.

“They flip between denial, to anger, to disgust, to thinking it's all a joke,” Leonard said.

His twin, Mitchell, said that's not completely true. The family believes he's a good candidate — they just don't want him to leave the planet, or to regret his decision as he journeys through space.

“The whole family knows that Cole can get picked,” said Mitchell, who is planning to room with Leonard in Lubbock, just as he does now in Plano. “They already see him flying off into the sky.”

Leonard said he understands that law school would be a more practical choice — and one that might prolong his life. But certain death on Mars doesn't scare him, he says, because death is certain everywhere.

If he becomes a lawyer, he said, “I am going to die here in some crappy retirement home in Florida.” If he's going to die anyway, he feels, why not do it somewhere exciting? “Why not Mars?”