



## **ITA's Intern Program And it's Impact on One Participating Student**

Inspired by the thrill of hands-on space research, many students over the years have participated in ITA's Intern program. ITA's program offers invaluable experience, some experiences only awarded to senior personnel in established aerospace corporations. At least one of those students, Mannix Aklian, has gone on to found his own small company, the biotech startup Label Independent, Inc., a contract lab providing label-free biochemical and cell-based assays. ([www.labelindependent.com](http://www.labelindependent.com)).

Aklian speaks glowingly of his days as a student intern with ITA. Practical experience "actually gave me an arsenal of tools that rivaled my college professors," he says. When he began his internship, "I was a 14 year old with a lot of questions. I'd never held a job, other than maybe mowing the lawn. And John (Cassanto) put me behind some million-dollar hardware. He put my experiment in there with some large pharmaceutical company, and I had just as much access.... I mean, it's like putting a kid who loves cars behind the wheel of a Formula One car with Mario Andretti." Aklian looks forward to working with student interns in his own company.



ITA Intern and Principal Investigator, Mannix Aklian (L) and ITA's Mark Bem (R) prepare biological samples for flight on STS-95. The samples being loaded are for a heart cell experiment that Mannix was conducting which was sponsored by ITA's hands-on Student Space Outreach Program.