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## Students give science a lift

By Jenny Kane The Daily Times

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**AZTEC** — After watching their experimental chile roaster shoot into the air with an SL-5 rocket last week, more than a dozen Aztec High School students waited to hear back about the viability of their chile roaster — a contraption that was supposed to run on the alternative energy created by the rocket's vibrations.

The news, which arrived Tuesday, is hot.

"We do have visual evidence that our chiles did roast," said Reggie Bell, department chair for the Aztec High School science department.

The roaster was one of nearly two dozen experiments chosen by NASA to accompany the rocket approximately 75 miles into the sky Friday at the state's nearly complete spaceport.

Most of the experiments were created by in-state student groups participating in Launch to Learn, a NASA-based effort to pull youth into science and math careers. A scant few experiments were out-of-state, though still from Launch to Learn clubs.

However, Aztec's students wanted to stand out.

"We're all big green chile eaters in the group," Bell said.

The outcome: a 1-inch-square oven that would heat a 1-square-centimeter scrap of green chile if all went as planned.

Granted, the plan was hardly a simple one.

The students used a method developed in the 1800s called piezoelectricity. Piezoelectricity, used to ignite grill lighters and put forth stereo sound, relies on the vibration of quartz stones, which create energy if jostled enough.

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of the rocket would create heat in their minuscule roaster if it moved enough. It appears they were right.

Based on images from a nano-video camera, it appears the green chile was tastily torched. Students, who have not seen the video of their chile's adventure, have yet to receive data on the voltage and temperature created by the piezoelectricity.

Students still are reeling from the image of the rocket launch itself.

"It went up like a bottle rocket," said Jacob Kelly, one of the seventh graders in the Aztec Launch to Learn group, named "Black Ops."

Of the 15 involved students, 11 members of the group went to Upham to watch the launch. During down time, the Discovery Channel sought out the "Black Ops" group to do a segment on their experiment.

"Apparently, our experiment was all the buzz,"

Kelly said.

The students likely will gather the remaining data within the next week. They hope to publish it this summer in a science-related publication, after which they hope to start on the next project.

"We have a couple ideas, but we're trying to save them in case someone gets word," Kelly said.

The students will continue their work in upcoming years, until the youngest of the members graduates from high school. Until then, they'll keep learning.

"The hands-on learning that took place is far greater than I could imagine. ... They get to understand what science is all about," Bell said. "We have gained so much."

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