

News

NASA docks in Rio Rancho with space camp

By Barron Jones
Special to the Observer

In an effort to support the President's Educate To Innovate Campaign, NASA's Summer of Innovation is scheduled to blast off at the Rio Rancho Boys & Girls Club.

The program, offered by New Mexico Space Grant Consortium, will host day camps for students in the fifth through ninth grades. Campers will participate in a variety of hands-on projects during the multi-week program. Camp organizers said the activities, which will take place every Tuesday and Friday beginning this week and running through Aug. 6, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., are designed to promote an interest in science.

"Kids are inherently interested in how things works in the world around them", said teacher Valerie Kovach.

Kovach and fellow teacher Jasmin Hairston were among the more than 130 middle school teachers from 32 school districts throughout New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and Maine who participated in a workshop at New Mexico State University. The workshop's focus was to instruct teachers on how to conduct and teach the latest scientific experiments.

"I thought it was fun," said Hairston.

The campers will conduct and construct experiments such as making and launching bottle rockets, building and using accelerometers and microgravity chambers, participating in a Mars Settlement Mission and using inertia measuring devices. Student will also design experiments for a sounding rocket. Selected experiments will be launched from Spaceport America, in Southern New Mexico, in April 2011. New Mexico is the only state that is offering a launch opportunity to students. NASA scientists will be onhand via Skype to assist.

Kovach, who has been working with adolescents for more than 15 years, said she saw many young people who didn't have a vision of their own future. However, she said once youth find a positive outlet they seem to excel.

Summer of Innovation is designed to improve STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) teaching and learning in partnership with federal agencies, academic and informal organizations, nonprofits and industry. One of NASA's goals is to increase the number of students entering STEM careers, with an emphasis on reaching out to low-income minority students. To reach this goal, NASA is collaborating with New Mexico Space Grant Consortium to use the agency's "out of this world" mission and technology programs during summer months.

"NASA is partnering with New Mexico, Massachusetts, Wyoming and Idaho in a pilot program to address our nation's critical science, technology, engineering and math education needs," NASA administrator and former astronaut Charles F. Bolden said.

"Summer of Innovation pairs the strengths of the states with NASA's unique resources to engage more young people and their teachers and inspire and equip them to excel in these critical disciplines."

The camp is free for Boys & Girls Club members; non-members must pay the Boys & Girls membership fee of

\$30.

For more information, contact Kovach at 604-3152; Jasmin Hairston at 419-340-6583; or Juanita Torrez at 908 6769. The Rio Rancho Boys and Girls Club is located at 4600 Sundt Rd. NE and can be contacted at 892-3191.