



# The Uvalde Leader-News

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## Local student wins national contest

by Heidi Hood - Staff writer

Mason Johnson, an 8-year-old who turned 9 yesterday and is a student at Anthon Elementary school, placed first in the grade four through six bracket in a national mission patch contest sponsored by Space Explorers, Inc.

Mason's patch design beat out 515 other entries submitted by students from across the country. As part of the contest, students were asked to design their own mission patch for an imaginary space mission. The students were instructed to write a brief mission summary in addition to sketching a patch design that incorporated the purpose of the mission, the mission number and crew names. The winners were chosen because of their unique design, mission goal, artwork, and the ability to follow the set guidelines.

Mason said that originally he was going to design a patch with a space rocket going to Pluto.

This mission was to sample Pluto's core with a satellite, he explained, adding that the explorers would be testing the temperature of its core.

But after some consideration, Mason decided that he wanted his mission statement to be a little more realistic. So instead of exploring Pluto's core the mission statement is to be the first astronauts to explore the red planet.

Mars is closer, he explained.

The next logical step, agreed Elaine Kiesling, Anthon principal.

Mason's mom, Lenise Johnson, said that Mason has always had an interest in space. He's always loved outer space, astronauts, space and planets, she said.

Mason agreed, but said that he likes all science a great deal and when asked he said he does not really want to be an astronaut when he gets older and he isn't sure what he wants to be.

I'm too young for the decision yet, he said.

Mason is part of the third- and fourth-grade gifted and talented class at Anthon. Kathryn Bendele, who is the science lab teacher, said that it was her turn to be the pull-out gifted and talented teacher for six weeks.

I polled the students, she said, wanting to find what they were interested in, and overwhelmingly the response was space.



**NATIONAL CONTEST WINNER** - Mason Johnson stands with (left to right) gifted and talented program teacher Kathryn Bendele, Anthon Elementary School Principal Elaine Kiesling and his mom, Lenise Johnson, after being presented with a certificate announcing his win in a national mission patch contest sponsored by Space Explorers Inc. and his patch artwork framed together. Mason's mom said that he has always loved space. (Staff photo by Heidi Hood)

The whole campus is really interested in space, she said, adding that there is not a lot of space education that takes place.

But the interest was there so her gifted and talented class decided to cruise the Internet in order to find Web sites that talked about space exploration.

That is when Bendele came across the Space Explorers Web site, and subsequently the contest for space patches.

I thought it was a great idea, she said.

So the kids in her class were given the outlines and they took those home to complete their patches.

I thought about it, Mason said, and some of things he drew were thought out, and some not so much.

For instance, originally Mars, which is a combination of orange and red on the patch, was going to be Jupiter, but then his mission statement changed so he had to change the planet. The rings of Jupiter became darker colors on Mars, giving the patch an almost realistic coloring.

That was an aspect of his patch that was not necessarily planned, but the dying star in the background was.

Mason explained that dying stars take on a darker color than newer stars and on his patch he emulated that, making one of the stars a more orange color than the yellow of the other ones.

When asked about the names of his crew on the patch he said he just picked names that he knew, like Karen after his aunt.

It's quite a piece, said Kiesling of the project.

For winning, Mason received a framed certificate along with his patch artwork and Bendele and her class will receive 100 patches in his design, ready to be sewn on.

For more information, or to see an example of Mason's work along with the runners-up go to Space Explorers' Web site, [www.space-explorers.com](http://www.space-explorers.com).