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Class goes to the moon

Thursday, May 26, 2005

By **SANDRA JOHNSON-BOHANNAN**
Staff Writer

UPPER DEERFIELD TWP. -- Woodruff School, we have liftoff.

"This is launch control."

"All systems are go."

Gifted and Talented 7th- and 8th-grade students from Woodruff School became astronauts on Wednesday morning as a simulated Lunar Prospector lifted off into space.

Public Affairs Officer Sarah Warren, 13, introduced the team and briefly summarized what the 20-student Lunar Prospector Mission Team was doing.

Their goal: To perform a low, polar lunar orbit, map the moon's surface and polar ice, measure magnetic and gravity fields and other studies.

Katie Cline, 13 and Gina Krawiec, 14, also from public affairs on the team, took turns detailing the mission, which was projected on a screen in the library at Moore School.

They began with mission directors leading and launch directors checking and calibrating the spacecraft for liftoff.

"We all worked through the problems very well," said Cline. "We all asked

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others' opinions (about) what we should do and then thought we all did good. I was really happy with the experience, and that I was involved, because this whole year we've researched the whole thing and to finally get it done is great."

After the mission team deployed all three stages and maneuvered the craft to a position orbiting the moon, the science team began to gather data.

Team members also interacted live via telephone with a Moonlink Mission Controller from Space Explorers, Inc., who assisted them with information and answered questions about the mission.

The team soon encountered an unscheduled problem with solar flares that could possibly have destroyed the Lunar Prospector.

"We got too close to the solar particles and then we tried to fix the problem," said Krawiec. "It had a technical problem that hasn't happened in four years, so we had to work through all that, along with the normal challenges that occur."

"I felt that this was a great experience and we've been working toward this the whole year, so it was great to finally see that all of our effort and research finally paid off."

Team members first gathered information about the problem, finally maneuvered the craft to safety and continued orbit around the moon, which ended the mission.

The students created a poster devoted to their extensive research on past Apollo launches, and also made several 3-D models of the Lunar Prospector.

In addition, the students designed two mission patches -- one centered around a vibrant, blue and green graphic of the earth and the other a colorful combination of American flag, planets and the spacecraft.

"The best thing we did was making the patches," said Allison Gaines, 13, a public affairs officer who also manned the video camera documenting the mission. "We all got into groups and then we chose the best ones out of each grade, 7th and 8th. We designed them by hand."

The team received certificates.

Their next project will be to study the data that they collected from the moon, according to gifted and talented teacher Lynne Triantos.

Each student wrote essays to apply for the 12 different positions on the team that they wanted.

"They really worked together as a team today to solve some of the problems, and some of the things that were thrown at them this morning," said Triantos. "It's part of their accomplishment."

"I think they learned a lot this year about teamwork and a lot about the moon. As a teacher, that's very rewarding for me."


Parents had the chance to watch while their children played a part in the mission.


"It was very interesting," said Sheila O'Hara. "I liked just watching the kids learn how to work with each other and get things solved, even with the glitch."

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"It's kind of sad that not everybody in the school can experience this, but I feel lucky that I could," Warren said.

Space Explorers, Inc. is an innovative, Internet education program, and the school received a grant from the New Jersey Space Grant Consortium to participate.

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