



MARY MARAGHY/Staff

John Sword of Sacred Heart Catholic School peeks in a microscope during Space Day at Orange Park Christian Academy.

Event aims at raising interest in spaceflight, aviation programs

By MARY MARAGHY
Clay County Line

They were given one egg, 40 drinking straws and a roll of tape. Their mission: build a protective casing for the egg so it would survive a 10-foot drop from a stepladder.

Some eggs survived while others spilled their yolks before the crowd, evoking moans, cheers and laughter.

About 400 junior high students from area private schools, in teams, faced the "aerobrake" egg challenge as part of Space Day at Orange Park Christian Academy, the small private school affiliated with Orange Park Assembly of God Church on Kingsley Avenue.

Space Day, a first-time event emphasizing manned spaceflight and aviation programs, was a four-hour program presented by teacher Kevin Simmons and his grant-winning academy students known for their work with NASA engineers on a bioreactor designed

to fly on a future space shuttle. The device will test the effect of gravity on bone density to support research on flight and osteoporosis.

"I want to increase grassroots interest in our space program," said Simmons, who formed Tekna-Theos Inc., a non-profit research company that in 2003 got a \$18,640 grant from the Florida Space Grant Consortium, which is funded by NASA and supports Florida-based space research and education. "I want to spark interest in Northeast Florida."

Most recently, Tekna-Theos got a \$50,000 private donation.

During Space Day, a sea of uniformed students from private schools including Pinewood Christian Academy, Sacred Heart Catholic School, St. Matthews Catholic School and Faith Christian, heard NASA engineer Bradley Carlson discuss advanced propulsion systems in space. The lecture had some of the students pondering the universe.

"I think it is interesting," said Pinewood student Meagan

Ball. "My question is how do they launch a space ship off the moon because there is no gravity."

Students looked at rockets on display, peeked in a telescope and got lessons on stars at various exhibits by the Northeast Florida Association of Rocketry, the Northeast Florida Astronomical Society, NASA's Kennedy Space Center, NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and Moseley Technical Services Inc.

"This is awesome," said Debbie Reynolds, a science teacher from Pinewood Christian Academy who watched her students participate in the aerobrake egg project. Austin Blocker and his team encased their egg between what looked like two miniature rafts made of straws.

"I like this," said Austin adding that he'd done a similar experiment, testing different parachute materials using eggs as passengers. "I think it's interesting."

mary.maraghy@jacksonville.com,
(904) 278-9487 extension 19.

Clay County EXTRA Line

Fleming Island • Orange Park • Middleburg • Green Cove Springs • Keystone Heights

Thursday
March 17, 2005
Published by
The Florida Times-Union