

Clay Today

Clay County Crescent

www.daytoday.biz

Section A-10

CLAYTODAY.BIZ

March 30, 2006

VOL. 36 NO. 13

MARCH 30-APRIL 5, 2006 EDITION

OPCA students make Washington visit

By Kelly J. Stigliano, Correspondent

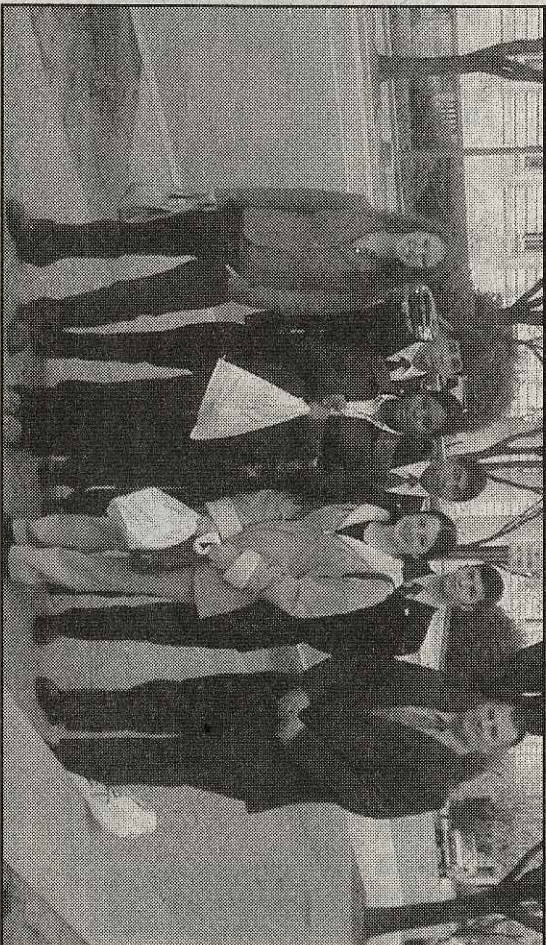
ORANGE PARK-Orange Park Christian Academy teacher Kevin Simmons has always had a passion for science, space and aeronautics.

He introduced the idea of a biotech club on campus and, in 2001 Tekna-Theos was incorporated with just six students and Simmons as the company's president. Those first students graduated, went on to college and are still on the Board of Directors. The company now has over 20 interested learners and the original goal continues with new projects in the works.

Simmons recently chose six 9th and 10th grade students from Tekna-Theos to join him in Washington, D.C. The goal was not to tour museums, colleges or government buildings. The goal was to lobby our Florida leaders for financial support for STAIRS, a statewide program.

STAIRS stands for Student Teacher Aerospace Education in Rural Schools. STAIRS represents an integrated approach to bring aeronautics and biomedical technology into high school science and math classrooms via teacher development.

STAIRS' aim is to increase the number of American engineering students by further developing our existing regional SPACE DAY events, conducting a series



THEOS students in Washington, D.C. were, from left, Deborah Eccles, Alex Benn, Erica Fitzgerald, Micky Calderon, Robyn Droughon, Joe Spradling and teacher and Tekna-Theos President Kevin Simmons.

of teacher modules and workshops; assisting teacher/student engineering teams to develop a biomedical space payload; validate program experiences through teacher/student payload flights utilizing ZERO-G aircraft.

Because education is a bipartisan issue, Simmons targeted both Republican and Democrat leaders. The goal is to have full

CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY KELLY J. STIGLIANO

government funding the first year, half government monies and half corporate sponsors the second year and be completely funded by corporate sponsors by the third year. He has already secured one corporate sponsor - Flightstar at Cecil Field.

In three days the six students and their two chaperones made the rounds of professional lobbyists.

After arriving on Wednesday, March 15, the group went to the Rayburn Building to speak with Sarah Prisser, Legislative Assistant to Congressman Cliff Stenns.

From Stenns' office the crew headed off to the Cannon Building for a photo with Congressman Ander Crenshaw and to speak with Nathan Riska, Crenshaw's Legislative Assistant. Again, the students each contributed their piece of the puzzle.

Thursday started with a meeting with Legislative Assistant, Spencer Wayne from Senator Mel Martinez's office. Simmons and his students returned to the Rayburn Building to meet with Lee Footer, Senior Legislative Assistant to Congresswoman Corrine Brown. Again, the students shone brightly as they each presented their remarks.

Friday morning brought a 9AM meeting with Stenns' Legislative Assistant, Robert Kuykendall for a tour of the Capital Building, which included visiting the floor of the House of Representatives.

On April 20 Simmons will take a few Tekna-Theos students to Tallahassee. Rep. Jennifer Carroll has coordinated a bus to take the students. They will meet with Florida's elected officials, including Governor Bush, to talk about Florida space interests and how it relates to education.

For more information about Tekna-Theos, please log on to tekna-theos.org.