

Community News

Conference provides educators a lesson on space station

Educators from around the world came to Houston Feb. 9-10 to get new ideas on how to integrate the most exciting project at NASA into their lesson plans.

Space Center Houston's International Space Station Educators Conference, now in its seventh year, is held for educators in all disciplines. They attend lectures and interactive workshops to gather ideas for motivating their students.

Space Center Houston started the conference seven years ago, so that the space station would be used in schools today as a current event. The organizers believe that teaching science and space all day, while getting the other topics covered, is possible. "Space is exciting," said



Kathryn Clark, former chief scientist of the ISS and keynote speaker at the conference. "The more a teacher can make it (learning) fun, the better. I'm a huge believer in entertaining your audience and then sneaking a little education in when they're not looking."

This amazing conference is a result of preparation by NASA, both JSC and Headquarters, Boeing and many more individuals that help to make it a success. Some of the volunteers return year after

year. ISS Commander Bill Shepherd has been present in some manner for at least the last five years. He used to communicate via satellite when living in Star City, then last year he appeared in person. This year, he promised he would talk from outer space and sent down a video



to play at the conference. This boosts the morale of the teachers even more, according to Susan Tortorici, a member of the Education Outreach Department at Space Center Houston, that Shepherd thinks enough of the conference and the educators that he would take time out of a busy schedule to follow through with their requests.

The 620 attendees from 42 states, Japan and Canada included teachers, principals, pre-service teachers and college professors, museum educators and even the education departments of Marshall Space Flight Center and Kennedy Space Center. The educators that come to the conference are truly dedicated.

Past attendees have returned to present workshops, like a music teacher who came back to explain how she produced a musical in her hometown about the ISS based on the information she received at the conference years before.

Other attendees return to share what they've done at their schools. One school converted the entire gymnasium into the ISS for six weeks. Parents were recruited to build the modules and fifth graders took turns spending three days inside the ISS as astronauts and outside as CAPCOMs.

The participants leave the conference inspired and rejuvenated about their career choice. Feedback questionnaires

got responses such as "I liked best 'the time to share and renew your souls,' and thank you for treating teachers as professionals!" Space Center Houston's major focus is to conduct the conference so that the teachers feel like the professionals they are, according to Tortorici, herself a former teacher. "Teachers are professionals. Teachers are the beginning. They are the key to the future of the space program." ■



Diving instructor goes over some diving basics for a simulated ISS underwater construction at Clear Lake High School.

JSC Fellowship Program

JSC will again sponsor the JSC Fellowship Program which provides a select number of employees the opportunity to attend graduate school for one continuous year on a leave with pay basis. The center strongly supports such opportunities because they contribute to organizational goals through advanced academic training and enhance professional and personal growth. The criteria for this competitive program include:

- Past performance in contributing to organizational mission and goals
- Applicability of the chosen area of study and its effectiveness in contributing to the achievement of JSC's mission and goals
- A brief statement of academic purpose from the applicant
- Academic record of the applicant
- Written recommendation from the division chief
- Activity level in the employee's office and the employee's own workload

Applicants must be permanent employees with at least three years of continuous civilian service at JSC which may include co-op time. Applicants are responsible for their application and acceptance to graduate school and travel expenses. JSC will pay tuition and related fees. Regular

"The NASA Fellowship program provides an invaluable opportunity for exploring new ideas and concepts. This program is especially beneficial because it allows you to focus completely on gaining knowledge away from the distractions and crises of work. Returning to work, applying the knowledge gained encourages 'thinking outside the box' – the very quality that makes space programs such an exciting place to be!"

– Sharon L. Thomas

service agreements requiring a period of three times the length of training will apply to the program.

Interested employees can request an application from Susan White at extension 37011 and should contact their training coordinators for directorate-specific guidelines. The complete application package should be forwarded to Susan White in the Human Resources Development Branch (AH3) no later than Monday, April 23, 2001. ■

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