COMMUNITY NEWS

Texas Independence Trail Riders pass through center

The Texas Independence Trail Riders made their way through JSC Feb. 9 on their way to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

They arrived at 3:45 p.m. as scheduled and were joined by 15 JSC Circle Riders. The group wound through the center and set up camp overnight at the Gilruth Center.

Later that evening, the NASA/Clear Creek/Friendswood Subcommittee of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's Metro Go Texan Committee sponsored a dinner and dance at Space Center Houston. More than 800 people attended the celebration. The highlight of the evening was the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's presentation of a $109,000 check to Longhorn Project officials, including JSC Director George Abbey. The donation will be used to complete the buildings and facilities of the Longhorn Project.

The event raised more than $19,000 for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's scholarship fund. The proceeds will fund scholarships for high school seniors in the Clear Creek and Friendswood school districts.

The Texas Independence Trail Riders packed up and departed the Gilruth Center the following morning, following a breakfast provided by Team NASA. ■

JSC Photo S99-01998 by James Blair

JSC Photo S99-01989 by James Blair

Dennis Klein (foreground) of Solutia, Inc. and Leon Blum (background), chief of staff, JSC's ISO 9000 Office, judge a McWhirter Elementary School student's volcano exhibit on display during the recent Science Fair.

Future engineers exhibit works during annual Science Fair

By Leon Blum

Johnson Space Center employees and contractors recently went out into the community to promote the sciences at 20 local elementary, intermediate and high schools.

Civil servants and contractor employees worked together, judging the many student entries in this year's Science Fair. Judges came from all the disciplines found across the center. Engineering, Medical Sciences, Legal, ISO 9000, and many other offices sent representatives to help local schools and students. Robin Hart, who works for Information Dynamics in the Public Affairs Office, organized and coordinated the judging activities.

The students worked hard to put together science projects that demonstrated their ability to understand and use the scientific method. Hundreds of projects were grouped into a diverse set of scientific topics including engineering, biology, math, consumer, Earth, and mechanics. Judges evaluated each student's work in the categories of scientific method, methodology, creativity and presentation. Judges also had the opportunity to provide written feedback to the students.

The exhibits showed each of the judges more than just the student's knowledge of the subject. The students all demonstrated their abilities, skills, hidden talents, hobbies and interests. From whether a bath uses more water than a shower, to the movement of light sensitive robots, the exhibits were all interesting. They showed what future engineers and scientists are thinking about today. ■

College students to conduct experiments on NASA's KC-135

Forty-eight teams of college students from around the country will be "floating" through school this month aboard a NASA research aircraft.

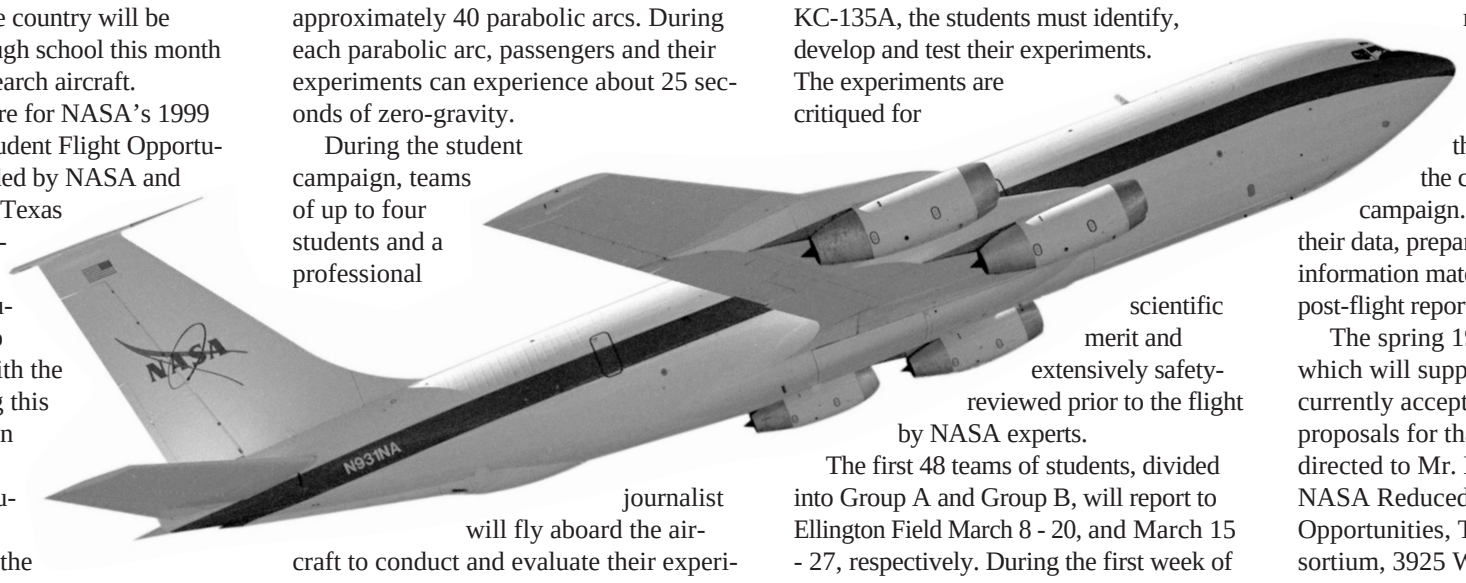
The teams are here for NASA's 1999 Reduced Gravity Student Flight Opportunities Program, funded by NASA and administered by the Texas Space Grant Consortium, Austin.

This year, the students will fly in two separate sessions with the first 48 teams flying this month and the rest in August. About 96 teams of undergraduate students will be taken aloft to study the effects of microgravity on various scientific experiments.

Teams are flying experiments aboard NASA's KC-135 aircraft that uses a roller-coaster-like flight profile over the Gulf of Mexico to provide brief periods of microgravity. Each flight includes approximately 40 parabolic arcs. During each parabolic arc, passengers and their experiments can experience about 25 seconds of zero-gravity.

During the student campaign, teams of up to four students and a professional journalist will fly aboard the aircraft to conduct and evaluate their experiments. The journalist will document and report on the students' efforts.

A supervising professor and a student ground-support team will remain at Ellington Field to support their flying counterparts.



Months before they get to fly on the KC-135A, the students must identify, develop and test their experiments. The experiments are critiqued for scientific merit and extensively safety-reviewed prior to the flight by NASA experts.

The first 48 teams of students, divided into Group A and Group B, will report to Ellington Field March 8 - 20, and March 15 - 27, respectively. During the first week of their two-week visit to Houston, program participants receive pre-flight training and assemble and test their experiment packages. During the second week, the students fly with their experiments, adjusting equipment as needed, and conducting post-flight debriefings and reviews. Each team also is required to develop a program for sharing the results of its experiment with teachers, students and the general public following the conclusion of the flight campaign. Participants must analyze their data, prepare applicable education and information materials, and submit final post-flight reports.

The spring 1999 student campaign, which will support 48 teams in August, is currently accepting applications. Student proposals for that campaign should be directed to Mr. Burke Fort, Director NASA Reduced Gravity Student Flight Opportunities, Texas Space Grant Consortium, 3925 West Braker Lane, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78759.

A list of the selected teams and additional information about the program can be found on the Internet at http://www.tsgc.utexas.edu/floatn/ ■