

Starry night for students

Written by By Dee Velasco
Friday, 19 May 2023 04:18



JFK Middle School hosts a Star Party

Moon parties and star parties are something that John F. Kennedy Middle School is famous for hosting every year, even enticing local stargazers with yummy s'mores.

However, this year's star party, which was initially planned for the month of January, was canceled due to bad weather. As luck would have it, JFK middle schoolers still got their chance at hosting another star party with the help of a few friends. By fate, the event moved forward on May 8 with the help of local teachers collaborating with "friends in high places."

It all began with local teacher Michelle Brown — a fifth grade teacher at Del Norte Elementary in Roswell — texting Mike Condrey, the science department Chair at JFK, saying she has a friend who works for NASA.

That friend is Brian Day — Deputy Staff Scientist at the NASA Solar System Exploration Research Virtual Institute. Day was going to be in Gallup May 8, and the new star party was arranged.

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“Without hesitation I said yes and that’s what got us going,” Condrey said in an interview with the *Sun*.

Condrey said it took less than two short weeks to plan out everything for the star party. They were able to secure the Star Lab — the district’s inflatable planetarium, two Dobsonian telescopes, as well as an EV Digital telescope.

JFK middle schoolers are learning how to use the new telescopes and with the event, it couldn’t have come at a better time.

“As our next star party comes around and our moon party, you’ll see that these [telescopes] are going to be a great asset to our school.” Condrey said.

Brown knew that the students from around the area would get a kick out of the party, especially with having somebody from NASA involved.

“I’ve worked with Day for a long time and was happy to hear that he was going to be in the area and it just fell together.” Brown said.

The event was meant to show students what’s out there in space, teaching them about the moon and other planets.

Day has been working for NASA for over 23 years, and has been working with Brown for many years, as well with other schools in the area doing some serious exploration of the moon.

Day said he wants the Navajo people to know everything they are planning and wants them to participate in the event and to be a part of it.

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“We are very aware that the moon is very sacred in the Navajo culture,” Day said. “We want to make sure that we have a dialogue going with the Navajo people to make sure that we are communicating and understanding any concerns that they may have.”

The students got the chance to use some of the same software that they use at NASA to find landing sites on the moon.

During his presentation at JFK Middle School, Day explained how NASA “treks” planets. Students also watched a 3-D virtual tour of the moon and other planets. Day talked about the planets’ terrains and other aspects of the solar system, while doing a show and showing off rocks from the moon and Mars, which the audience could touch.

Day spoke about the Rover paths on the moon, and how elementary students are using that same software to study craters on the moon. He said a trip is being planned to the Meteor Crater in Arizona to compare the crater there to the craters on the moon.

Kazee Smith, a fourth grade student from Jefferson Elementary who out to see the digital telescope, said it was the “funnest part” of the event. Smith said he loves science, astronomy, and everything about the solar system.

“I like knowing about stars and black holes,” Smith said, “It’s cool how the digital telescope can connect to other devices and how it’s all mechanical.”

For more cool space information be sure to visit www.trek.nasa.gov or www.heavensabove.com

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