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NASA-inspired project for middle-school teachers teaches basic rocket science

Teachers will launch rockets at “Lunch and Launch” presentation by Palm Beach Community College professors

When National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) engineers launched paper rockets, they had a blast. Last year when the “Lunch and Launch” program for Palm Beach County middle school teachers was initiated by SpaceTEC™ partner Palm Beach Community College, they were thrilled. This year a new group of science, technology, engineering and math teachers will not only launch paper rockets but plastic water bottle rockets as well on April 24 at the South Florida Science Museum in West Palm Beach from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The launch is set for 1:30 p.m.

PBCC is one of a 12-college national consortium (SpaceTEC™) to benefit from a National Science Foundation grant to train aerospace technicians and provide outreach to the K-12 school system to interest young people in space. PBCC primarily uses the grant funding for the “Lunch and Launch” program. The College will offer the same program to local art teachers on May 8 at the Old School Square Cultural Arts Center in Delray Beach.

The middle school teachers will hear presentations by PBCC professors while they build their rockets and launch pads. Engineering professor Thomas H. Steffen, Ph.D., who assisted Brevard Community College in establishing their aerospace technician degree program, is the event’s organizer. Jon Saken, astronomy professor, and John Berryman, physics professor, will teach the math and science behind rockets and projectiles. Teachers will receive lesson plans and launchers to share with their students, plus VHS tapes, CD-ROMS and numerous educational materials from NASA. Besides a free lunch, the 30 local teachers will receive a stipend and in-service points.

“They’ll gain the ability to create an interesting, hands-on lesson for their students and hopefully create an interest in space,” said Professor Steffen.

For more information on the NASA consortium, go to www.spacetec.org

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