

Satellite experiment lifts off

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By KATY GAGNON
H&N Staff Writer

Ferguson Elementary teacher Linda Kehr won a \$10,000 grant from the Toyota TAPESTRY Program. But it was her students who really won - her group of fifth-graders touched a piece of space through a balloon satellite project.

From a field at the Oregon Institute of Technology last weekend, the students launched a hand-made balloon satellite that reached about 89,000 feet. It fell back to Earth when the balloon burst from air pressure, and the kids chased down their device.

The science project recently received national recognition as an innovative way to promote science and literacy in elementary students.

Building their satellite

A couple months ago, Kehr's fifth-grade students began building their "satellite," which was a small box made out of foam board with a data logger stored inside. Insulation was used to keep the data logger warm on its journey. Students designed the satellite and were only given a few parameters to follow, Kehr said.

Once the satellite was in the air, Kehr and a group of six students, called the "Chase Crew," jumped in Kehr's van and followed the balloon using a GPS tracking device and a laptop.

The chase ended two hours later when the satellite landed, and the group retrieved the satellite and processed the data collected during the journey.

The students tracked light intensity, temperature and humidity. They will make a power point demonstration of their findings. Kehr is excited to have her class' data included with data from OIT students.

Kehr's students said the satellite project was "really fun" and was by far their favorite science experiment.

"I would do it again in a heartbeat," said fifth-grader Jimmy Marquit, who helped chase down the satellite.

Kehr found out she received the grant last February. "The principal and I were hugging and screaming in front of the kids," she said. The grant will pay for Kehr and two other elementary teachers to receive additional training in the satellite program. It will also fund new equipment for the program, such as a GPS device, a couple laptop computers and books for the school library.

Kehr said she has to spend the entire \$10,000 in one year, but the training, equipment and books will benefit students for many years.

Kehr was one of 50 teachers nationwide to receive the grant. Applications were judged by the National Science Teachers Association.



(H&N photos by Paul Titus) Ferguson Elementary fifth-grade teacher Linda Kehr and her student Bubba Sellars hold research packages while waiting for a balloon satellite launch.

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Members of the OIT Mars Reach team prepare a balloon for launch.



Students from the fifth-grade Ferguson Elementary class who participated in the OIT Mars Reach balloon launch are left to right: Chandker Davis, Zakerey Panchot, Jimmy Marquit, Bubba Sellars, Vanea Bennett and Katie Guest. Their teacher, Linda Kehr, and OIT President, Martha Anne Dow, stand in back.