

# Cumberland students visit ‘Mars’ in study of coal and space

Cumberland Elementary School Teacher Terri Jenkins and 75 students recently returned from Mars.

Jenkins and her classes participated in the Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky’s “Mars Invasion 2030 – from Coal Camp to Space Camp.”

“My students were so excited about this trip to the Challenger Learning Center,” said Jenkins. “The staff was amazing with them. The lessons really sparked an interest and engaged the students with awesome learning experiences. I was very impressed with the connection of all disciplines.”

Students investigate how coal mining and space science are alike during the visit, said Tom Cravens, director of the center, which is located on the campus of Hazard Community and Technical College.

“The program includes the curriculum materials, teacher training and the visit to the center for the students,” he said.

Jenkins said the program shows students how the disciplines of science, math and technology are applied in both space science and coal mining and how similar many of the job duties are for astronauts and coal miners.

Alex Creech, a member of the class, said the flight simulator was a highlight of the experience for him. “I definitely liked everything there,” he said, noting teamwork activities made the trip beneficial as well.

Student Abby Sherman, said “I learned at the challenger center that Mars can be interesting and cool to learn about. Also, I learned that Rovers are hard to control... Going to the challenger center was a great experience and I had fun. Thanks to Mrs. Jenkins for making this trip possible.”

The Mars program was created and developed through a partnership between challenger center in Hazard and the Coal Education Development & Resource (CEDAR Inc.) based in Pikeville. Jenkins explained that students completed various hands on projects with a purpose of making the connections for the Mars trip and how it is actually tied to a coal career, assigning jobs, designing a space craft and work station.

As a related experience, students visited the Portal 31 in Lynch, touring the coal mine turned tourist attraction. This helped students make connections between space and the coal industry as well, she said.

“I would most definitely recommend this program” to other educators, Jenkins said. She expressed appreciation for being awarded ARI grant allowing students to participate.

Cravens said coal companies used to pay \$575 to sponsor each classroom participating and often covered bus transportation costs. Since the decline in the coal industry, the center is utilizing funds for schools in the member districts of the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative’s Appalachian Renaissance Initiative.

A large federal education grant allotted funds for such activities. The grant is administered by KVEC. The Harlan County School District is a member of the organization.

Those funds expire next year, said Cravens. As a result, Cravens and the center staff are working with the region’s schools to locate and secure new funding sources. He said he certainly hopes efforts are successful so students can continue to travel to space right here in eastern Kentucky.

