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SEYMOUR JOHNSON AIR FORCE BASE, N.C. - Fifth grade students from across the Goldsboro, North Carolina community, graduated from Seymour Johnson's Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration (STARBASE) program June 27, 2014, here.

During the graduation ceremony, Col. Lamar Pettus, 4th Fighter Wing vice commander, presented certificates to those who completed the program. He also expressed his wishes for it to continue long term.

"It's amazing that STARBASE has been around for 23 years," said Pettus. "I think it will be amazing to see where each of you will be in the next 23 years when STARBASE is on its 46th year. I hope it will have made a difference in each of your lives."

STARBASE is a collaborative effort between the base and the surrounding community to promote education and innovation. During the five-day program, local fifth-grade students study science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines beyond their current grade level. Students also learn through hands-on activities, including rocketry, hovercraft and simulator flight. This graduation marked the 23rd class to complete the week long program.

"This is an important program, it's amazing what it does for our children, for our country, for our Air Force," Pettus said. "To be able to introduce these young folks to science and technology and how they work in the world is amazing."

Sixty students spent their mornings in downtown Goldsboro, North Carolina, receiving class room instruction and studying topics like Newton's Laws of Motion and Bernoulli's Principles of Flight. In the afternoon they traveled to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, to see the topics they learned put into action.

"The program is successful, because it's structured and crammed full of activities, yet fun," said Janie Best, 4th Force Support Squadron Force Development chief. "Students do so many hands-on activities that they do not have time to get bored. The classroom learning is much more effective when the students are able to see the principles they've studied applied to the day-to-day operations of Team Seymour."

Several squadrons, assigned to the 4th Fighter Wing, hosted the students, showing them how math and science are incorporated into each of their jobs.

One of the orientation visits was to the 4th Weather Squadron. While there, the students received a tour and an in depth explanation from Airmen on how science and technology help in the planning and carrying out of missions.

"With the help of the wing's Airmen, these children took their minds to places they couldn't dream of at the start of the program," said Capt. Thomas Morrill, 335th Fighter Squadron pilot. "After this week, I'm sure when they look at an airplane, gaze at a thunderstorm or look at a map of an unfamiliar place, they will remember their time here and feel inspired to explore further."

STARBASE is open to the community. The registration period for student participation in STARBASE runs from February to March. Due to the overwhelming support of the program those interested in participation may be placed on a waiting list. For more information, contact the STARBASE organizer, at (919) 722-5810.

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