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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. — A ribbon cutting ceremony marking the official STARBASE Academy opening took place Feb. 2, introducing the facility to dignitaries, students and other interested parties. The academy is located in building 850.

Under a beautiful, blue Colorado sky, McAuliffe Elementary School fifth-grader Stephanie Molina positioned the ceremonial scissors and snipped the red ribbon opening the pathway to unique encounters with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics education. Col. Michael Hough, 21st Space Wing vice commander, said it is good to finally have the project completed.

“It’s been a long time coming,” Hough said, “The application was made in 2010, but the vision for it started well before that... we hope this is the first of many, many years to come.”

Plans to bring STARBASE to Peterson were ready to go when sequestration hit, Hough said. He credited retired Gen. Gene Renuart and his wife Jill for their commitment and effort to bring the facility to fruition.

“It would not have happened without them pushing,” Hough said. “They paved the way. We are so happy it finally materialized.”

Fifth-graders from McAuliffe Elementary School who were the first group through the local STARBASE Academy agree with Hough.

“I think it’s awesome! I like that it’s a fun way to learn,” said Landin Langridge.

“It’s really awesome. I like that it teaches you chemistry,” said Nicole Rodriguez. “We’ve done measures and learned why some pennies’ weight is different than others.”

Jose Parra elaborated on his classmates’ excitement about the facility.

“I think it’s good because I get to learn a lot of stuff,” he said. “Today I learned about volume and that you can redesign something that didn’t work out. I think all children should do this.”

The STARBASE Academy focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education and operates on a set curriculum, said Yvaal Hampton, STARBASE Academy director. The classes combine teaching and hands-on experience to provide students with something that will stick with them after their time at STARBASE is over. The first day covers the engineering design process and students build an “eggbert” space shuttle. The program also covers math mysteries and students examine hair and DNA, Newton’s Laws of Motion, build models of molecules, cover chemistry and even Bernoulli’s Principle and a geocaching

activity.

The facility has unique equipment on site and more coming soon. For example, Hampton mentioned the CREO 3D computer assisted design program, an expensive, top-of-the-line program provided by John Deere and the Department of Defense. To make the program even more valuable Hampton said STARBASE will get a 3D printer in the coming months.

The program targets fifth grade students from local public schools. Public schools provide transportation to and from the academic site for their students. STARBASE is a five-day program with students attending one day per week for five weeks.

“We can modify it per school, especially if there is something like state mandated testing a year out or something,” Hampton said, “so we try to be flexible.”

Collaboration is a big part of what STARBASE does as well. Hampton pointed out a planned field trip to the Peterson Museum, a tour of the 302nd Airlift Wing’s C-130s and a guest from Schriever Air Force Base talking about STEM and how it is used on the job.

“I also want to say collaborating with School District 11 has been such a great experience for me,” Hampton said. “I’ve had a lot of positive feedback from the community.”

Funding for the building’s renovation came from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs in the amount of \$335,000. Air Force Space Command covered the remaining \$118,600 for construction and design. In March, OASD-RA provided \$450,000 to cover startup costs and first year operation expenses. The facility includes a director’s office, two instructor spaces, one assistant area and two classrooms. Along with Hampton, there are two full-time instructors and two part-time assistants.

In addition to the Renuarts, other individuals noted for their contribution to bringing STARBASE to Peterson were Ernie Gonzalez for his advocacy and funding, and Barbara Koscak, co-founder of STARBASE Academy, for her support and efforts in establishing the program.

For original article, click [here](#) [1].

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