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As a matter of fact, it is rocket science

Posted November 9, 2013



Thomas Weeks (left) of Rackspace helps seventh graders Jake Duncan and Bethany Hsiao find the rocket that they had assembled the previous day. Michael Shroyer | Special to The Roanoke Times

BLACKSBURG - The question, "When are we ever going to use this?" will likely be echoed in science and math classes throughout the country this school year.

A group of local rocket enthusiasts teamed up to provide the answer to the age-old complaint to some Blacksburg Middle School students this week.

More than a dozen combined volunteers from the technology firm Rackspace Hosting, and rocketry clubs VT Rocketry and NRV Rocketry, spent Wednesday and Thursday afternoon holding a rocket workshop for 24 members of school's Technology Student Association club.

The group taught students the concepts of rocketry design and theory, as well as the math behind calculating a rocket's maximum altitude, before assisting students in the construction of their own individual 12-inch rockets.

"We all love technology, so it's be really cool to be here," said eighth-grade student Caroline Sparrow.

During the workshop, Caroline and her classmates were also given an overview of careers in the aerospace field by Kevin Shinpaugh, Virginia Bioinformatics Institute's director of Information Technology and Computing Sciences.

"It was really cool to hear all these things you could do that might be someone in this room's future," Caroline said. Caroline's thoughts were likely music to the ears of workshop organizer Thomas Weeks, who said the effort was a part Rackspace's Rack Give Back initiative, which is focused on exposing children to the fun side of engineering and technology.

He said the company spent almost \$500 to make the rocket workshop possible.

"That's [the age] when they find out what their passion is, what they want to do," Weeks said.

The school's technology education teacher and club sponsor, Stephanie Crawford, said she hoped teaming up with the group would help provide the members of the student-led organization with a glimpse of real world experiences connected to their studies.

The students were scheduled to launch their creations into orbit Thursday, but fierce winds postponed the take-off.

Weeks said they hope to hold the launch when the club meets again in two weeks.

Regardless of the delay of the much-anticipated launch, many students said they had already enjoyed seeing how their schoolwork could lead to a potentially fun job, just as Weeks and the group had hoped.

"The stuff you play with as a kid, can turn into a career in life," Weeks said.

Speed: **Photo 4 of 10**



[Blacksburg Middle School rocketry workshop](#)

11/8/2013 -- MICHAEL SHROYER | Special to The Roanoke Times

[11/7/2013 (Ask Travis who this guy is?) speaks to the students on the different types of propellants used by the varying classes of rockets.] Photo By: Michael Shroyer

By [Travis Williams](#)
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