SPACE SCIENCE EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR K-5 STUDENTS: D'Ann Douglas, Sallie Curtis Elementary School, 6225 N. Circuit, Beaumont, TX 77706 and Space Science and Technology Educational Program, Department of Geology, Lamar University, Beaumont, TX 77710

The Space science education program of Sallie Curtis Elementary School started in 1990 with the participation of its first grade students in the NASA sponsored Space Exposed Experiment Developed for Students (SEEDS)\(^1\). This program consisted of planting both the cosmic ray exposed [through Long Duration Exposure Facility (LDEF)\(^2\) of NASA] and the control tomato seed samples in our school garden and growing the tomatoes (to test for possible mutations induced by exposure to higher level of cosmic radiation). We named our project "the great tomato adventure" which received national attention\(^3\). The students from the first group saved the seeds for the next years class. Each year students grow the garden and save the seeds for the next year; thus "space tomato garden" has become a tradition at Sallie Curtis Elementary School.

In 1991 I attended the NASA Educational Workshop for Elementary Science Teachers (NEWEST) at Johnson Space Center, Houston. This workshop introduced me to various aspects of the NASA space program. In 1992, I decided to begin a Young Astronauts Chapter\(^4\) for the students to study mathematics and science (for about one hour after school) through the space science curriculum. I expected about thirty students to join the program. However, when I came to the school the next morning I had seventy three first, second, and third grade students anxiously waiting to join the program who brought their parents as well. This program has now grown to 134 students that is divided into five groups. These students also help me with the Young Astronauts Group at a "soup kitchen" for the poor and homeless (one saturday a month for about an hour). We have about thirty children, first through sixth grade in this chapter that is sponsored by a local TV station.

Two years ago I got a satellite dish (courtesy HEB Pantry Foods) which I use for the students to monitor all shuttle missions and participate in electronic field trips. One of our first interactive conference was with astronaut Tom Jones. If a shuttle launch or landing occurs during the school day you will find as many as 150 parents and students watching NASA select at our school. On one occasion we had to delay the beginning of the school because parents and students were watching the launch!

Our students and their parents also participate in the annual, well-publicized "star parties" arranged by the Astronomical Society of South East Texas. This group provides telescopes for the students/parents and public and explains about the astronomical objects observed through the telescopes.
The study of space has now spread throughout my curriculum. I use the subject to teach writing, reading, art, mathematics, and science. Due to the interest in science at Sallie Curtis elementary school we now have a science lab for our school. This lab has been furnished with supplies from the community. We would like to develop this lab as a model for other elementary schools in the region with the support of the Space Science and Technology Educational Program conducted by Lamar University-Beaumont.

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