

Keating and NASA

Students participating in a program that connects to Space Center Houston

Students at Keating Elementary are getting a first-hand look at life in space this year through a program offered by the JPL Museum in Stayton.

James Loftus founded the museum in honor of his dad, Joseph P. Loftus Jr., whose career at NASA spanned five decades.

Loftus, in partnership with Oregon Connections Academy, developed a program called Remote and Distant Interactive Online Sessions (RADIOS). These sessions are streamed live from Space Center Houston once a month to classrooms across Oregon, including Keating School.

"We'll make it a year-long learning project," said Amanda Wilde, principal and head teacher.

Loftus' goal with RADIOS is to inspire youngsters to think about careers in STREAMM (science, technology, robotics, engineering, art, math, and medicine).

In the first RADIOS program on Oct. 17, Keating students learned about life onboard the International Space Station. Most notably, they saw how liquids act in space as the astronauts chased droplets of coffee.

"Astronauts really like to play with their liquids," said second-grader Maliyah Culp.

On Oct. 22, the Keating students were treated to a visit from James McBarron II, who worked at NASA from 1961 to 1999. McBarron shared conversation — mainly about reading — over a lunch of homemade chili and cornbread, then took the students and staff on a storytelling adventure about his time at NASA.

Actually, his experience started before he was an official employee. From

1958 to 1961 McBarron was a student test subject on experiments for space suits in extreme conditions.

During his career with NASA McBarron worked on Project Mercury, the Gemini Project, Apollo 9, Apollo 11, Apollo 13, and Apollo 15.

Throughout his talk, McBarron paused a few times for Loftus to pass around space-related items such as an astronaut's glove, the rubber cover for a boot, and a piece of the heat shield from Apollo 11 (that's the one that took men to the moon in July 1969).

McBarron took questions from the students. How thick is a space suit? Eleven layers. How thick is the glass in a helmet? Nearly a quarter-inch. Who was the youngest person to venture into space? McBarron didn't know the answer to this one, and asked the student to research it and get back to him.

Only one topic drew near silence from the students — it was when McBarron talked about bodily functions in space, and how astronauts wear diapers.

No one spoke.

And then a quiet voice whispered: "Oh, gross."

Which made McBarron grin.

He left them with three pieces of advice:

- "Decisions have consequences and determine your life path."
- "Continuing education is important."
- "You must enjoy work to be successful at it."

During his day in Baker City, McBarron addressed students at Baker High School in the morning, prior to his time at Keating.



Keating sixth-grader Brett Whitley tries on an astronaut glove during a visit from a retired NASA employee. Christian Graham, back, eagerly awaits his turn to see the glove.



Maliyah Culp takes a turn to feel the rubber cover that goes over an astronaut's boots. Its ribbed tread is the footprint seen when Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon in 1969.