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Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2011

NASA workshop draws teachers from across state

By MICHAEL W. PANNELL - Sun News correspondent

WARNER ROBINS -- Jenny Taylor, a fourth-grade teacher from Chalker Elementary School in Kennesaw, was happy enough to rise early Saturday and travel the 130 miles from north of Atlanta to the Museum of Aviation.

She was going to a science conference, and she loves science.



Danny Gilleland/SPECIAL TO THE SUN NEWS Nancy Sills, a middle school teacher from Harris County, looks through a telescope to see a solar flare during one of Saturday's Science, Technology, Engineering and Math workshops at the Museum of Aviation.

GALLERY: NASA forum at Museum of Aviation

Taylor, along with more than 120 other teachers from 19 counties across the state, was at the museum for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (S.T.E.M) workshops put on by the museum's NASA Regional Educator Resource Center.

"What I've gotten in the first part of the day today already matches what I'm doing with my kids right now on stars and space and how they're studied," Taylor said. "It's great. I'll be able to bring materials from here straight into my classroom and teach my kids how professionals study and learn about space, and how they can too."

Taylor said her principal didn't even know she was coming to the event, nor was she using county money for her expenses.

"I came because I'm interested," she said. "A friend told me about it. Anything I can find to make subjects more interesting and beneficial to my kids, I'm all for it. Most teachers are working with limited classroom resources. To find this kind of information is just great."

Clare Swinford, head of the NASA Educators Resource Center at the museum, said the facility is a preview and distribution center for NASA-produced educational materials. All focus on S.T.E.M. disciplines.

Saturday's event was the first day-long effort to get the word out about what is available.

"Space is not just what NASA is all about," Swinford said. "NASA has 10 field centers, and each is responsible to provide educational services for its region. As many teachers as we can make aware of

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what NASA has and can do for them, the better.”

Swinford said the local center is overseen by the Kennedy Space Center Office of Education in Florida. She said the local center offers books, CDs, DVDs, and other materials for loan -- or for duplication if the borrower provides blank media -- and has free teacher guides.

Saturday’s sessions included workshops on topics like NASA Fit Explorer, NASA Education Programs, Digital Learning Networks, Outdoor Solar Astronomy, Planetary Geology, and more.

A session called Lunar Sample Certification even qualified teachers to borrow moon rocks for classroom use.

In addition to NASA personnel, four sessions were led by NASA-trained teachers from Houston County. They were Dawn Hardy from Perdue Elementary, Dora Waite from Russell Elementary, Cheryl Long from Bonaire Elementary and Joe Molyson from Houston County High School.

Northside High School’s Tonya Woolfolk was in attendance at the workshop along with about a dozen Houston County teachers. Woolfolk said she was getting good, usable information that she planned to use in her classroom on Monday.

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- Breaking News
- Business
- Crime & Courts
- Columnists
- Education
- Local
- Gas tracker
- Houston/Peach
- Nation
- Obituaries
- Photos
- Politics
- Schools
- Technology
- Video
- Weird News
- World
- Wires

SPORTS

- Baseball
- Atlanta Braves
- Basketball
- Colleges
- Fort Valley State
- Georgia Southern
- Georgia Tech
- Univ. of Georgia
- Mercer
- Columnists
- Football
- Atlanta Falcons
- Golf
- High School
- Hockey
- Horse Racing
- Little League
- Motorsports
- NASCAR
- Atlanta
- Other Sports
- Outdoors
- Wires

ENTERTAINMENT

- Celebrities
- Comics & Games
- DVDs/Videos
- Horoscopes
- Local theaters
- Movies
- Music
- Restaurants
- Television
- Wires

LIVING

- Dear Abby
- Education
- Family
- Food
- Health
- Home & Garden
- Mark Ballard
- Neighbors
- Recipes
- Religion
- Teens
- Travel
- Wires

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- Apartments
- Cars
- Celebrations
- Homes
- Jobs
- Legals/Notices
- Newspaper ads
- Obituaries
- Weddings & Engagements

