

Gardner Magnet launches rockets

By: Jay Bell - Sentinel-Record Hot Springs, AR

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ROCKETS READY: Third- and fourth-grade members of the Gardner Magnet Science Club gather around their rockets as they are prepared for launch on a sunny Monday morning. Students and Major Riccio of the Civil Air Patrol launched 33 rockets.

Third- and fourth-grade students at Gardner Math, Science and Technology Magnet School had the opportunity to launch 33 rockets at school on Monday.

Members of the Gardner Magnet Science Club built and launched the rockets with the help of Major James Riccio of the Civil Air Patrol 40th Composite Squadron. Riccio is one of only four CAP aerospace education officers in the state to earn a master rating in Aerospace Education.

Monday marked the first time Angela Stanford, a science teacher at Gardner, has conducted the activity and it was the first time Riccio has launched rockets at Gardner. Riccio said he has visited numerous schools and launched many rockets. Stanford said she attended a NASA rocketry class at the Mid-America Science Museum.

"I actually built (a rocket) for myself last year and then wrote a grant this year with the Civil Air Patrol," Stanford said. "We received the grant and here we are today."

Stanford said she built B12 rockets last year, but students launched Estes rockets with A3 engines on Monday. The students' rockets had the capability of flying 300 feet high. Riccio brought three rockets of his own that had the potential to fly twice that high.

Each of the 30 members of the Science Club built and launched his or her own rockets. The other third-graders at Gardner were able to watch some of the launches. Stanford said the activity correlates with science, technology, engineering and mathematics studies.

"It goes along with our 'force in motion' unit of study," Stanford said. "All third- and fourth-grade students are doing a 'force in motion' study, but then with the engineering component – the Science Club is a STEM club – they really get into the engineering component of it."

The skies were clear for viewing of the rockets' ascension. Parachutes deployed from the rockets and carried them back to the ground, but wind gusts scattered the descending rockets in an unpredictable manner.

Stanford said other students created water bottle rockets in a recent activity using an air compressor. Gardner students are also working on gliders after another teacher received a grant for airplane activities.

Prince Brandon, a recent graduate of Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, assisted with the launches on Monday. Brandon, a Hot Springs native, will teach fourth grade at Oaklawn Visual & Performing Arts Magnet next school year. Riccio was also hopeful that the activity would spark some students' interests in aerospace education.

"CAP has a very good program for the kids and the adults," Riccio said. "We even have a flight simulator now."