

@head: Armada students “travel” to outer space
@thead: Amateur operators help with day of questions
@by1: By Matt Fahr
@by2: Armada Times Reporter

@body: In what can only be described as the farthest teleconference ever held in the Armada School District, students got a chance to ask NASA astronaut Michael Fincke whatever was on their mind.

Last Friday afternoon the Armada Middle School gymnasium was the site for the unusual event.

In cooperation with NASA and ARISS (Amateur Radio on the International Space Station) and sponsored by USECA (Utica Shelby Emergency Communication Association) students were chosen to pose questions to Fincke as he passed 232 miles over Armada traveling at 17,500 miles an hour in the International Space Station (ISS) Local amateur radio operator Tom Tincknell and middle school media specialist Geri Asaro were the main brains behind the conference that was originally scheduled back in May. NASA canceled the meeting a week beforehand with no make-up date on the horizon.

Asaro got the call a few weeks ago that things were back on for the meeting and all of their hard work, such as building a special antenna on the roof of the middle school, would not go to waste.

“It all hit us this morning that it was all coming together. Thank God there were no problems,” she said.

A screen on the stage showed the exact location of the ISS in orbit and as soon it was over Armada Tincknell called Fincke and he responded. It sounded as clear as if he were talking to him via CB in another room in the school.

“I am very happy with the way it all worked out. It was such a great experience for the kids,” Tincknell said.

Middle school principal Bill Zebelian added, “I thought there would be more static, but the kids did a great job.”

The 500 parents, students and teachers in the gym remained silent as one student after another took turns asking the Pennsylvania native questions about life in space.

“How big is the space station and how large will it be when it is finished?” was one of the questions posed by fifth grader Anna Dillingham of Armada.

Elijah Zentz asked who or what inspired Fincke to become an astronaut and he responded by telling the crowd that “the moonwalk” in 1969 was what lured him into space.

“It felt like a dream. It was really cool,” Dillingham said. She has now narrowed her list of future professions to astronaut or “big animal veterinarian”.

Her father Dan was impressed with the effect the whole event had on the students.

“You could really see the impact it was having on the kids sitting in there. You could see them realize that something like this is a big deal,” he said.

Afterward there were sighs of relief and handshakes all around as the USECA team began to roll up their cables.

By the time they signed off and the gym had cleared, Fincke was already over South America.

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CUTLINES

Photos by Matthew Fahr

(44mfSpaceStation 1)

@body: Geri Asaro, and Brad Tarrot and Phil Manor from USECA prepare to make contact with the International Space Station as it passes over Armada. The 10-minute conference was tightly scheduled, but came off without a hitch as students asked astronaut Michael Fincke what was on their minds.

(44mfSpaceStation 2)

@body: Tom Tincknell holds the microphone as Chad Kavanagh asks a question to Fincke. 12 Armada students from various grades got a chance to ask questions as the ISS orbited over Armada.

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