



A mission with impact

AAE students participate in NASA's first lunar mission in decades

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APPLE VALLEY

• Hundreds of sleepy-eyed children, staff and volunteers wandered into the Academy for Academic Excellence's mission control early Friday, listened to a short phone call with their lead scientist, watched a live NASA video feed go blank — and erupted into applause.

After nearly four months of preparation, a week-long moon camp and a 3 a.m. wake-up call, the impact of the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite, or LCROSS, mission seemed a little anti-climatic, but it was the ending NASA and AAE officials wanted.

Friday morning NASA crashed a rocket into the moon in a mission searching for water. In a special partnership with NASA, Lewis Center students had been tracking the mission since the spacecraft took off in mid-June.

The impact did not emit the large plume of debris amateur astronomers and public viewers hoped to see.

But the NASA officials touted the mission a success, and participating students said they enjoyed the project.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience; it was amazing," said Jackson Bridges, 10, one of 71 students to participate in a moon camp leading up to the impact. "I mean, it's just so cool that I can be alive when this happens ... that's the first time I've seen live pictures of the moon."

An image on the large monitors at Lewis Center's mission control rose and then abruptly dropped — an indication the module successfully impacted with the moon.

"From mission control you could see the signal just disappear," said Lewis Center CEO Rick

Piercy. “That was pretty dramatic.”

NASA’s first mission to the moon in decades drew interest far beyond the Lewis Center. More than 1,600 joined the Apple Valley school’s online system monitoring the mission, including followers from Oregon, Hawaii, Texas, Chile, England and Puerto Rico.

The crash landing also drew an overflow crowd of about 300 people for the public viewing, which filled the school’s auditorium and cafeteria.

NASA’s goal is to find ice crystals and possibly water on the moon. Instruments confirm that a large empty rocket hull barreled into the moon at 4:31 a.m., followed four minutes later by a probe with cameras taking pictures of the first crash.

Beyond all the excitement and data, this mission may have planted seeds for another generation of scientists and mathematicians.

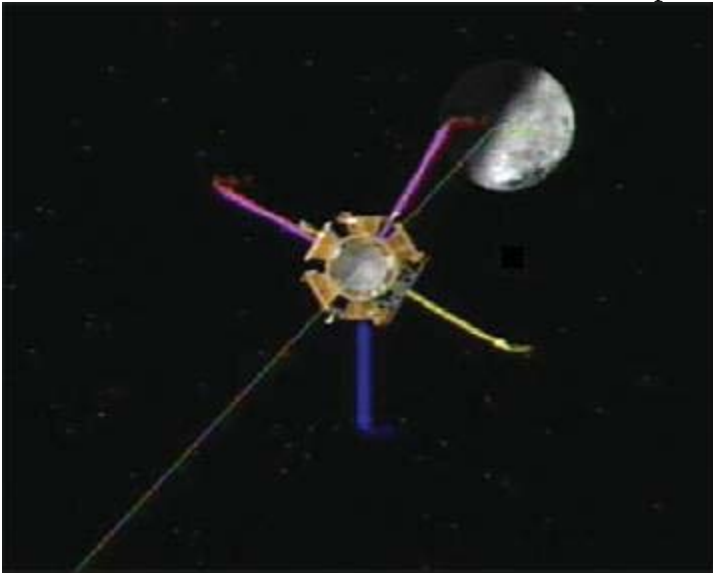
“I think they can see what’s possible in the future, that this is science on a huge scale for them and that’s very interesting to most of them,” said parent and Lewis Center chaperone Karen Bridges. “They were just mesmerized by the live feed of the moon.”

The Lewis Center hopes to continue a partnership with NASA, which plans to launch more participatory learning experiences at other schools across the nation.

“It was a lot of fun,” Piercy said. “More importantly, it was educational. It shows NASA that these students can collect data and can work with scientists in real-world experiments.”

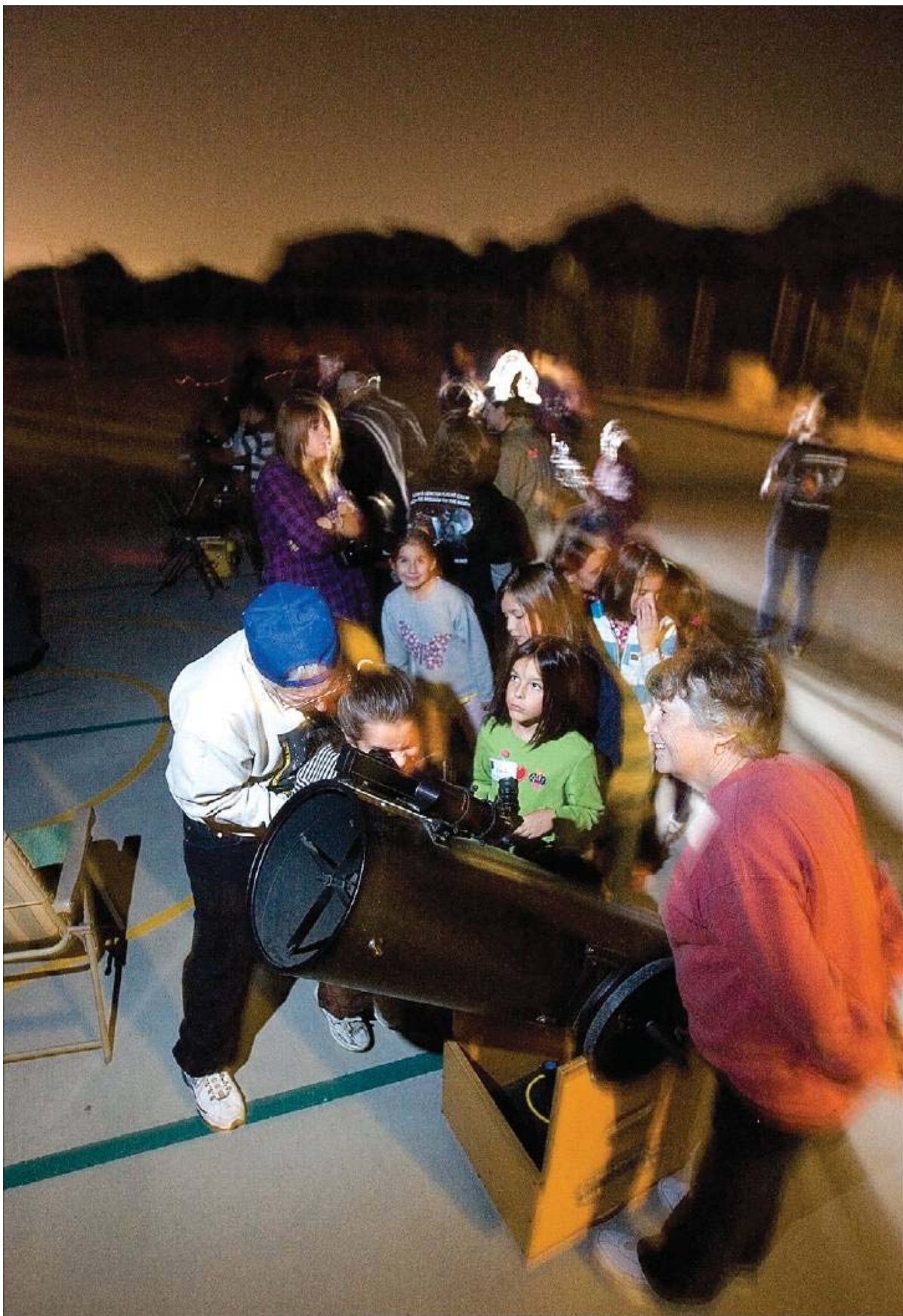
To learn more visit www.nasa.gov/lcross/.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



NASA PHOTO

ON TARGET: An STK (satellite toolkit) image of the LCROSS spacecraft after Centaur separation.



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WHAT A VIEW: Lewis Center students of Apple Valley look at star formations through a 10-inch reflecting telescope, which was one of various telescopes from amateur astronomers on Thursday night as they prepare to watch the LCROSS satellite impact on the moon at 4:30 a.m. Friday.



JAMES QUIGG, DAILY PRESS

REALLY IN THE MOMENT: Michael Girgenti of Los Angeles wore his Apollo 11 replica space suit to the public viewing of the LCROSS impact at the Lewis Center.



JAMES QUIGG, DAILY PRESS

ANTICIPATION: Moon Camp students stay alert while preparing for the LCROSS impact Friday morning. Volunteers reported that few students could sleep leading up to the 3 a.m. wake-up time.



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ANSWERING A FEW QUESTIONS: Lewis Center staff answer questions from moon camp students about the radio telescopes they operate to collect data for the LCROSS mission. Most students got a chance to move the 1 million pound antenna with the touch of a mouse button.



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WELL DONE: Rick Piercy, CEO of the Lewis Center, congratulates camp staff and volunteers after the impact.



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A LITTLE PROBLEM: Students react to the LCROSS impact. The video was an anti-climatic blackout, but the data graph showed a rising bar.

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