HIGH DESERT
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INSIDE
The High Desert received a smoke advisory Wednesday due to a wildfire in Banning fueled by strong winds that had raged through 2½ square miles. **Page B5**

Dr. David Jauncey, of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, speaks to Tiefort View Intermediate School fourth-graders during an assembly on Wednesday.

GAVRT PROJECT
NASA scientists visit Fort Irwin school

BY SHEA JOHNSON ~ STAFF WRITER

FORT IRWIN • Young students at Tiefort View Intermediate School sought more answers than NASA scientists could offer Wednesday afternoon.

"If we found extra terrestrials, what would you do?" one fourth grader posed to Dr. David Jauncey and Steve Levin after the pair wrapped up their third and final assembly of the day.

Jauncey, a visiting Australian scientist from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Levin, a JUNO project scientist (NASA's Jupiter exploration program), were at the Fort Irwin school to prep the students for their forthcoming involvement with the Goldstone Apple Valley Radio Telescope (GAVRT) program.

GAVRT originated at the Lewis Center for Educational Research, a K-12 charter school in Apple Valley, and affords students an opportunity to operate from within the classroom the 112-foot radio telescope located at Fort Irwin — one of only three of its kind in the world.

"I wanted them to meet me, get the concept and get ready," explained Levin , who is also GAVRT's lead scientist. "It's a golden opportunity to integrate GAVRT into core curriculum, not just be an extra."

Integration efforts have not been without challenges since Tiefort fourth - grade teacher Kristen Scarberry brought the program to the school approximately five years ago.

Inspired by watching her daughter, Alicia, flourish in the program as a senior at the Lewis Center, Scarberry has since worked to get it off the ground at Tiefort.

"The biggest roadblock has been that it's not set up for you," she said. "You have to dig."

Scarberry has partnered with others to define how exactly the program should operate and, with infrastructure already set, GAVRT should be up and fully running at Tiefort next school year, according to Principal Dr. Ed Thompson.

In fact, all teachers have been trained on the program as of two weeks ago. On Wednesday, they were being shown how to view the telescope feed and communicate with officials at the Lewis Center from inside a room at Tiefort that more resembled a mission control center.

Equipment in the room and a field trip next school year to the Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex at Fort Irwin is provided through funds from the military, which Scarberry called full supporters.

Participating GAVRT students are expected to learn skills in communication, data analysis, graphing, manning a telescope, scheduling and the scientific process. Yet Thompson believes the program can also provide an opportunity for learning that extends far beyond science.

The process of observation, testing and hypothesis, provided by Thompson for an example, could be utilized by students in multiple facets of their lives.

At lunch, after the third assembly, Levin and Jauncey shared how encouraged they were by the student response.

"We were inviting kids to think," Levin said. "Hopefully, they grow up as adults who think."

Jauncey noted he did not mind the seemingly endless sea of little hands raised high during the question-and-answer portion of the final assembly.

"The questions are as important as, if not more so than, the answers. The real value of science is that you seek the answers," he explained, which called to his mind another question from a young student.

"What would you do if there was no telescope?" an inquisitive fourth grader asked.

The pair's response: "We'd invent it."

Some questions can be easier to answer than others.