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VICTOR VALLEY, CALIFORNIA



REACH FOR THE STARS

The Lewis Center takes education to new heights

FLOURISH HERE

The High Desert is ideal for businesses, families

Here's to Your Health

The Victor Valley's residents have access to many wellness options

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ON THE COVER The Victor Valley Bicycle Club meets to hit the trails surrounding Bell Mountain in the desert of Apple Valley.
Photo by Michael Conti



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Reaching for the Stars

THE LEWIS CENTER TAKES
EDUCATION TO NEW HEIGHTS



While teaching kindergarten and directing a Young Astronauts science program at Mojave Elementary School in 1985, Rick Piercy had a bright idea. He invited students and their families to come to school at night to see Halley's Comet through a telescope, and the response of more than 200 attendees overwhelmed him.

"It was after 10 o'clock when we finished, but we knew astronomy was something that captured the imagination of children," Piercy recalls. "So we began raising money to build an observatory."

The Lewis Center Is Born

Five years later, the Apple Valley Science and Technology Center opened. Now called the Lewis Center for Educational Research, the facility oversees two charter schools and has been called "one of the most interesting, unique and unusual educational institutions in the nation."

One of the Lewis Center's charter schools is the Academy for Academic Excellence, a K-12 school

spread out on three campuses in Apple Valley.

The Norton Space and Aeronautics Academy in San Bernardino is the Lewis Center's other charter school, serving grades K-6. Each year, the NSAA adds a grade level, with the goal of becoming a K-12 school by 2018.

Academy for Academic Excellence

Judy and Ron McFadden of Victorville sent all three of their children to the Academy for Academic Excellence.

"Our oldest daughter, Erin, graduated in 2011, and our twin girls, Cori and Dena, will graduate in 2013," Judy McFadden says. "They've all really thrived there. It's not a huge school, so you can be the big fish. The teachers really care too – several teachers really took an interest in our kids."

All three of the McFadden girls were involved in AAE's ROTC program, and the twins are aiming for careers in the Air Force.

"For my kids, AAE was a perfect match. They've done very well on state tests and SATs, and my oldest

is now at the University of Hawaii and says she felt much better prepared for college than other incoming freshmen," Judy McFadden says.

Goldstone Apple Valley Radio Telescope

The Lewis Center also features the Goldstone Apple Valley Radio Telescope, a project with NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory that allows teachers to access a 34-meter radio antenna via the Internet.

"Mission Control is in our Mojave River campus and is open to teachers and students, not only in the Victor Valley, but we work with schools in 38 states, 14 countries and two U.S. territories," Piercy says. "Our GAVRT program has a free online training curriculum open to all schools including homeschoolers and private schools. Students at the middle and high school level work with NASA scientists and actually control these nine-story-high, million-pound antennas from their classrooms and gather real data that is being used to promote our understanding of the universe." ■



From left: The Lewis Center for Educational Research's Thunderbird Campus; A classroom at The Lewis Center for Educational Research's Mojave River Campus; Rick Piercy serves as the Lewis Center's founder, president and CEO.