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ATTENTION: Science/Education/Family Section Reporters

PITT MEADOWS STUDENTS MAKE MARS A MISSION POSSIBLE

Vancouver, BC, May 12, 2006 – If you can't go to Mars, you can always make Mars. That's the lesson being learned by 75 students from Edith Mcdermott Elementary School in Pitt Meadows who today are helping colonize the floors of the UBC gymnasium with Martian habitats constructed with plastic and duct tape.

The grade five-to-seven students are participating in the Canadian National Marsville program's Link-Up Day hosted by the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. Canadian National Marsville is a cross-country and cross-curricular program where students plan a mission to Mars by applying knowledge from a variety of subject areas, including science, math, technology, communications, humanities and social sciences.

Students prepared for today's Link-Up Day weeks in advance by working in their schools on the following activities: learning how to construct a Martian habitat by also learning about Mars; designing their own team mission patch; researching and designing life support systems (air, water, transportation, communication, etc.); and communicating with other students outside their classroom in order to cooperatively design their habitat.

Kevin Davies, a grade six and seven teacher at Edith Mcdermott has been participating in Marsville for the past five years since being introduced to the program during a teacher exchange on the Sunshine Coast. This year, he recruited two other grade six and seven teachers, David Bird and Karen Lowrie, to participate in the event.

"My students and I enjoy the "bubble making" experience every year and the changing themes that keep the excitement alive when working towards building a successful Marsville colony," said Davies. "After Link-Up Day, we bring our projects and the "bubble" back to school and set it up in the library for a week so other classes can see what we've created over the past 12 weeks. And it never fails that at the beginning of every school year, my new students ask, "Are we participating again in Marsville?"

The total 480 Lower Mainland students participating in today's event also represent schools from Surrey, West Vancouver, and Vancouver. Today's Link-Up Day at UBC involves 40 rolls of duct tape and plastic, and is the largest Link-Up Day ever undertaken by the Space Centre.

"The H.R. MacMillan Space centre is delighted to host Canadian National Marsville for the 11th year because it is beneficial to students in many ways," said Donna Livingstone, executive director for the Space Centre. "It gives them the chance to build life skills in a variety of areas, and provides a unique experience outside their everyday world -- especially for students participating who, otherwise, might not have access to an opportunity like this."

On hand for the event is guest speaker Matt Bamsey, a PhD candidate in space science, from the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

"Mars is now a realistic international goal and it is likely that someone the same age as the students participating in the Marsville program today will be the first to set foot on the red planet. Marsville is a great tool to inspire and motivate students, and one that ensures they understand that their dreams are, in fact, possible," said Bamsey.

Key supporters of Link-Up Day are the RBC Financial Group which, through the RBC Foundation, provided corporate funding for Canadian National Marsville in BC, RONA, which generously contributed the construction supplies, and the UBC Faculty of Science.

"RBC Foundation is pleased to be partnering with HR MacMillan Space Centre and the Marsville program. At RBC, we believe that exciting programs such as Marsville inspire students, encouraging them to explore new and exciting opportunities. This program opens up a whole new world to students, and we are so pleased to play a small part in making this possible," said RBC Foundation manager Jennifer Toderan.

The H.R. MacMillan Space Centre is Canada's leading space learning centre. It is a non-profit community resource that brings the wonders of space to Earth, while providing a personal sense of ongoing discovery. Through innovative programming, exhibits and activities, its goal is to inspire sustained interest in the fields of earth science, space science and astronomy from a Canadian perspective.

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