



1100 Chestnut St.
Vancouver, BC V6J 3J9
Phone (604) 738-7827
Fax (604) 736-5665

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ATTENTION: Science/Education/Family Section Reporters

WEST VAN 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 26 students from Ecole Pauline Johnson Elementary in West Vancouver who today are helping colonize the floors of the UBC gymnasium with Martian habitats constructed with plastic and duct tape.

The grade six and 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.

Stephane LeBlanc, a grade six and seven teacher at Ecole Pauline Johnson Elementary, signed up his class for the third time to participate in the annual Canadian National Marsville. "Marsville is a fascinating and engaging learning experience for my students" said LeBlanc.

"The learning involved is second-to-none. The students gain a lot from the experience, including the knowledge associated with the solar system, space exploration and Mars. But most importantly, they gain valuable teamwork skills and hands-on experience in building their life-support systems.

"Link-Up Day is a high-energy, action-packed day and the kids have a blast, making it fun for teachers and parents as well," he added.

The total 480 Lower Mainland students participating in today's event also represent schools from Surrey, Pitt Meadows, 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.

Media Contacts:

Erika Korstrom, Marketing & Communications Officer, H.R. MacMillan Space Centre,
Tel: 604-738-7827 ext. 249 Cell: 778.838.9267 ekorstrom@hrmacmillanspacecentre.com

Michele Penz, Calico Communications for the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre
Tel: 778-888-2249