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ATTENTION: Science/Education/Family Section Reporters

LOWER MAINLAND 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 480 Lower Mainland school students who today are colonizing 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.

The students participating in today's event represent schools from West Vancouver, Surrey, Pitt Meadows, and Vancouver.

Four Vancouver schools and 257 Vancouver students are involved in Marsville, including McBride Elementary, Edith Cavell, St. Anthony's and Lord Kitchener. Bonnie Kent, a grade six teacher at McBride Elementary in Vancouver, leads one of the groups of students into Marsville. "Marsville crosses all kinds of curricular boundaries and lets the students really get into an integrated project for a sustained period of time so they develop many different skills," said Kent.

Today's Link-Up Day at UBC also 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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