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Space suit is perfect fit for the classroom

Linton Springs tracks broadcast from 'SuitSat'

BY HEIDI SCHROEDER

Michael Lyons is a graduate student at McDaniel College, studying to become an art teacher.

But it's a love of space that Lyons, working as a permanent substitute, has tried to bring to Linton Springs Elementary School.

He has performed a variety of programs at the school — includ-

ing one to have a moon rock on display for students. But when he met Pat Kilroy, the planets aligned, so to speak, to take his passion to the next level.

On Monday, Kilroy, a Sykesville resident and NASA engineer, visited Linton Springs with tools to help students take advantage of an

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Links to visit:

http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/26jan_suitsat.htm

<http://www.suitsat.org>

<http://www.patkilroy.com/amsat-dc/>

Students at Linton Springs gravitate toward heavenly research

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opportunity to pick up transmissions from space.

The transmissions were emitted from "SuitSat," a unique satellite program proposed by Russian cosmonauts to make use of a worn out space suit.

"Those things wear out," Kilroy said, "just like your jeans."

Kilroy said it's easier for astronauts to simply release their suits from space — rather than bring them back to earth with them.

With this in mind, the Russians proposed that the suit could be released with a radio transmitter inside and that a signal on the transmitter could be picked up by anyone with the proper tools.

Thus, SuitSat was born — or launched — on Feb. 3.

On Monday, Lyons greeted Kilroy at the school, and the two set up a station so that students could attempt to pick up the signal as SuitSat passed over the school at 9:30 a.m.

According to a press release on NASA's Web page, the transmission

Spaced Out

For more information about the SuitSat program, visit http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/26jan_suitsat.htm.

Want to find out where SuitSat is now? Visit www.suitsat.org and keep track.

runs for 30 seconds, then there is a 30 second pause, then the transmission runs again.

The recording holds an introduction and greetings in English, French, Japanese, Russian, German and Spanish.

Students and radio users across the world have been tracking the transmissions; some have been posted at www.suitsat.org.

"This was the first time something like this was ever done, and the people who built the equipment to make it didn't have much time," Kilroy said, saying that the idea came to the Russian scientists just a year before it was to be implemented.

Alas, Kilroy and Lyons said stu-

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dents on Monday didn't hear much more than static — due possibly to battery failure or temperature problems — as the suit passed over Linton Springs.

Nevertheless, Lyons said the students seemed very interested in the experiment.

"They had one of the quietest moments that you can get out of them," Lyons said. "For nine minutes they didn't say much."

After orbiting with the space station for a few weeks — traveling at around 17,000 miles per hour — SuitSat will eventually succumb to gravity, falling into the earth's atmosphere, where it will simply burn up.

And while the experiment didn't produce stellar results on Monday, Lyons said he's hopeful for an even more ambitious project in the future.

He said he's already spoken to Kilroy about trying to arrange communications with passengers on the International Space Station.

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