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6th Grade at J. G. Whittier Middle School Looking Up at Night!

Haverhill, MA: The sixth grade class at J. G. Whittier Middle School spent Thursday night at the school with local amateur astronomers observing everything from the planets Jupiter and Saturn to the Andromeda Galaxy, over 2 million light years away.

The “Star Party,” as these events are called in astronomical circles, was organized by amateur astronomer Brewster LaMacchia and 6th grade teacher Robert Estes. They are both part of Project Astro, a national project that links astronomers with educators and students in the fourth through ninth grades. Over 200 schools nationwide participate in Project Astro, which is a National Science Foundation funded program developed by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP).

Members of two local astronomy clubs, the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston (ATMoB) and the North Shore Amateur Astronomy Club (NSAAC) provided over a half a dozen telescopes for students to view the skies with as well as answer questions. An outdoor walk through solar system model and an indoor slide show provided additional activities for the students and their families.

Mr. LaMacchia, who takes time off from work at Jovian Systems, Woburn, works with the students as a team with Mr. Estes. Previously the two have created a number of hands on astronomy experiments, including making a comet out of dry ice and other common ingredients, and a scale model of the solar system over a half-mile in size.

Mr. LaMacchia noted “*Astronomy is the perfect way to get students interested in science - what kid can’t draw a picture of Saturn?*” This is the first year for Project Astro at Whittier Middle School, and Mr. Estes said of the program “*I have never had my students as enthusiastic about learning science as they have been by having an outside astronomer come in and enhance the activities.*”

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Note to editors:

This event is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 19th weather permitting, other wise it will be attempted again on Tuesday, Nov. 24th. Please contact the school after 2PM on the date of the event to confirm. This release was written assuming the event took place on Thursday.

Events is scheduled from 6:45 to 8:30PM.

School phone: 978 374 5782.

School Principal: Gerry Quatrale

For more information:

ASP/Project Astro: <http://www.aspsky.org>

ATMoB: <http://www.atmob.org>

NSAAC: <http://www.star.net/people/~nsaac>

Attachment:

4 page handout that will be given to students at the event.