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Challenger Center begins countdown to blastoff in Ferguson

Joe Scott
Of the Suburban Journals Ferguson-Berkeley
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The countdown has officially begun on the Challenger Learning Center-St. Louis.

Construction began June 9 on the regional center, which will simulate space flights and the Johnson Space Center's control room.

The center at 205 Brotherton Ave. in Ferguson will be next to the new McCluer South Berkeley High School. It is at the former site of the district's child care center.

Inside the building the ceiling slopes up toward the middle, which is perfect for the center.

"A lot of people have said it's like it was meant " said Tasmyn Scarl Front, director of the center. "A lot of things have really sort of fallen into place."



Bill Cain with Konzeny-Wagner Construction removes the sign from the Ferguson-Florissant School District's child care center on Brotherton Lane in Ferguson. Construction began June 9 for the district's new Challenger Learning Center inside the building. When completed, the center will feature space flight simulations and a mission control center modeled after NASA's Johnson Space Center.
(Michael Reigner photo/Suburban Journals)

The center is due to be completed in November. About 100 missions have been scheduled, and missions already are being scheduled for 2004.

"Kids will be seated here to learn about our mission to Mars," Front said, indicating an area in the large room.

"Then, they'll split up and half will go into the space station simulator and the other half will go into the mission control center," Front said.

The experience is real enough for students to get into the action.

"In other centers, teachers have had to take younger children out of the simulator to show them they weren't really in space," Front said. "The program actually will take them to a different place. It's like getting into a movie. You know that it's not real, but you get into it anyway."

Before teachers and students go through a mission, they receive curriculum materials that are aligned with state standards, helping integrate the Challenger program into classroom study. Teachers also go through a pre-mission training session.

"The curriculum that supports this culminating exercise is heavily oriented towards math and science," said Ferguson-Florissant Superintendent E. James Travis. "It provides a concrete example of applied math and applied science."

Travis noted the program has students playing roles as astronauts or engineers using math and science skills. They experience the outcome of their work, he said.

"On top of that is the work of a cooperative nature where they have to rely upon each other to do things to complete the mission," Travis said. "This is going to have a lasting effect on all our children."

The center is open to other school districts, community organizations, the public and corporations interested in a leadership or team-building program.

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The Ferguson-Florissant School District is a partner of the St. Louis Science Center and Cooperating School Districts in developing the center.

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Looking back, peach taffeta made
a hideous bridesmaid dress.