

Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009

## **\$5M renovations to space laboratory thrill students**

by Margarita Raycheva | Staff Writer

From: [http://www.gazette.net/stories/11052009/frednew152723\\_32526.shtml](http://www.gazette.net/stories/11052009/frednew152723_32526.shtml)

Breckin Sontz was overwhelmed with excitement when she walked into the new Earth and Space Science Laboratory in Frederick.

There was just too much for the first-grader at North Frederick Elementary School to see, too much to explore.

Unable to stay in one spot, she ran through the crowds from one exhibit to another, trying to pet the turtles, check out the fish, touch the horseshoe crabs, and look at the snakes and spiders all at once.

"She is so excited, she doesn't even have a chance to take it all in," said Breckin's mom Holly Sontz, admitting that even she was shocked by the numerous live animals, interactive displays, and touch stations inside the shiny new laboratory.

"It is just so exciting," Sontz said. "I had no idea they had all this stuff here."

Sontz and her family were among more than 2,000 visitors who came to tour the new \$5 million Earth and Space Science Laboratory for its open house on Monday.

Among other features, the new building contains a 78-seat planetarium with a 35-foot dome and a 360-degree planetarium machine. The 10,624-square-foot building is a replacement for the aged 3,300-square-foot laboratory space inside Lincoln Elementary.



The new building includes two science classrooms, an oceanography lab, a geology lab and 22 aquariums with an array of water inhabitants.

The Earth and Space Science Laboratory is also the first Frederick County Public Schools' building with a geo-thermal heating system, which cools and heats water using the temperatures below the earth's surface.

The new building will serve all elementary students in Frederick County Public Schools.

The new laboratory opened for students in October, but Monday was the first day when the public could also tour the state-of-the-art science laboratory.

And hundreds of students, parents and county residents took advantage of that opportunity. Crowds of visitors kept pouring into the building from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., forcing organizers to print extra handouts and pack shows at the planetarium to the brim.

"As soon as we opened the doors this morning, there were 150 people already waiting outside," said Chris Horne, the school system's elementary science curriculum specialist. "People are waiting for 45 minutes to see the planetarium shows."

Mark Bowman, one of the co-directors of the Earth and Space Science Laboratory, said he was thrilled with the number of people who came in.

"This is our way of thanking the community, thanking the donors," he said.

Nearly 500 individuals, groups and foundations donated money for the new lab, he said. The money was used for equipment, displays and classroom materials inside the new building, Bowman said.

While the open house organizers were thrilled about attendance, visitors also seemed stunned by everything inside the new laboratory.

Joanna Barton, who brought in her two children to see the new lab, said she remembers the old space for the laboratory from the time she was an elementary student in Frederick County.

"This was my favorite field trip," she said.

Yet, the old space was small, crammed and inconvenient for teachers, she said.

"This is so much better," she said. "Everything here is so neat. There is so much more stuff. And [the teachers] will not be tripping over people to teach."

Gage Parsons, a fourth-grader at Kemptown Elementary, agreed. "It's a lot bigger than the other one and they have a lot more things," Gage said.

During the open house, he had a chance to check out everything inside the new lab. He played with the animals, saw the rocks and snakes in the geology lab, and saw a show inside the new planetarium.

But he could not say what feature of the new lab he liked the most. "I just like it all," he said.

E-mail Margarita Raycheva at [mraycheva@gazette.net](mailto:mraycheva@gazette.net).

-10,624 square feet

-78-seat planetarium, with 35-foot dome

-Geothermal heating/cooling system – a first for Frederick County Public Schools

-Solar power system, with 75 solar panels

-Two science classrooms, a geology lab and oceanography lab, office space and welcome area

-A system of 22 saltwater, fresh water and brackish water aquariums; a pond and stream display

-Authentic replica of an Apollo spacesuit

-The building received \$700,000 through donations to the Spaceship Earth Fund at the Community Foundation of Frederick County; \$130,000 donated materials and labor and \$50,000 in grants.

-Cost of construction, design and equipment: \$5 million