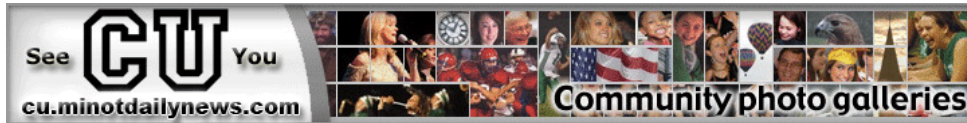


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DoD awards educational cooperative \$300,000 grant

By ANDREA JOHNSON, Staff Writer, ajohnson@minotdailynews.com

POSTED: April 26, 2008

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MINOT AIR FORCE BASE – The U.S. Department of Defense has awarded the Mid-Dakota Educational Cooperative a \$300,000 grant for a STARBASE program at Minot Air Force Base.

Starting this fall, fifth-graders from Minot and surrounding school districts will be bused to the base for five days of activities related to math and science, which will be taught by certified instructors using an approved curriculum.

"They're going to make little rockets," said David Looyen, superintendent of the Minot Public School District.

That's only one example of the type of activity children will be engaged in, said Kathryn Pederson, director of the Mid-Dakota Educational Cooperative.

Kids will work on computer aided design programs. Looyen said some activities might encourage kids to do experiments related to buoyancy. They want to encourage kids to maintain an interest in math and science that might lead some of them to consider engineering careers.

Studies have shown that kids start to lose their interest in science after about the fourth grade.

The United States doesn't produce enough home-grown scientists right now, which might eventually lead to national security issues, which is why the Department of Defense is interested in funding such a program. Looyen compared it with the push in the United States to improve science education after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in the 1950s.

Pederson said the STARBASE program will be of real benefit especially to students in the rural schools surrounding Minot, who don't have access to all of the technical education that has been available in Minot.

Minot alone didn't have enough fifth-graders to qualify for the program, but the fifth graders in the 10 schools that make up the educational cooperative were enough to qualify, she said. Mid-Dakota Educational Cooperative, which are part of what the state calls the regional education association, members are Minot, Des Lacs-Burlington, Glenburn, Lewis and Clark School District, Surrey, Max, South Prairie, Nedrose, Eureka and Bell.

STARBASE is a national Defense Department program launched in 1993. Ernie Gonzales, of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, said the program will have 60 locations by the end of the fiscal year, serving 980 schools in 200 school districts in 34 states. Each program is sponsored by an armed services division such as the U.S. Air Force or the Army National Guard.

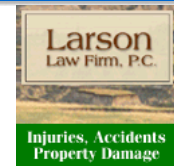
This program was possible because of the cooperation of the school district, the community and Minot Air Force Base, said Gonzales, who attended a signing of a memorandum of agreement with the Mid-Dakota Education Cooperative at the base on Friday afternoon.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., helped secure funding for the program at Minot AFB, said Looyen.

Article Photos



Andrea Johnson/MDN Ernie Gonzales, left, of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, passed a \$300,000 check for the STARBASE program to Kathryn Pederson, center, director of the Mid-Dakota Educational Cooperative, during a ceremony Friday at Minot Air Force Base. At right is Col. Joel Westa, commander of the 5th Bomb Wing at the Minot base.



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Looyesen said Sue Whelan, wife of Col. Marty Whelan, commander of the base's 91st Space Command, was also a major supporter of the program.

Supporters have been trying to get STARBASE in place for two years. It has taken a lot of work. All said they're excited and think this will be a major benefit for the children.

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