

Starbase NEKAAL

By Scott Sackrider

When cooperation between two fun and educational entities join efforts, the results can be nothing but fantastic. That's what happened during the inaugural festivities at the Ramada Inn on January 7th. Kansas STABASE, operated by the Kansas Air National Guard, has a mission to teach kids science and math, using space and technology. The Northeast Kansas Amateur Astronomers' League (NEKAAL) has a mission of finding Near Earth Objects (NEO) that may impact the earth. NEKAAL also has an outreach program to teach kids and adults astronomy facts.

The two joined together to operate a starlab, which is a portable, domed planetarium. A projector in the center displays stars, constellation and planets, as well as earth science features. The starlab can hold up to 25 kids as well as the speakers.

The speakers were Janelle Burgardt, the outreach person for NEKAAL, as well as Brian Martin and Scott Sackrider, who are also members of the Kansas National Guard. Martin is a Meteorologist for the 190th Air refueling Wing and Sackrider is the Information Assurance Manager for Joint Forces Headquarters.

The three spent the afternoon teaching kids about constellations. There were 225 kids, as well as the mascots from KU and Wichita State Universities that visited the starlab. The three speakers told stories while showing the constellations, including a family that revolves around the North Star, as well as the origin of some of the names in the Harry Potter series. It took several days for their voices to heal from speaking so much.

"The Starlab is a great resource for reaching kids. There are always a lot of 'oohs and ahs' when they use it. The [Kansa National Guard] should be applauded for their efforts in showing kids that science can be fun.", said Burgardt.

More Information can be found on their respective websites at www.KANSASSTARBASE.org and www.NEKAAL.org



Janelle Burgardt of NEKAAL cautions the audience that it can get spooky once the lights are down.



Karen LaValle of STARBASE, coordinates with Janelle Burgardt of NEKAAL on operating the starlab at the inauguration.