

These signals are loud and clear

Local radio club members team with Kuss Middle School students to maximize NASA program

KATHLEEN DURAND
HERALD NEWS STAFF REPORTER

FALL RIVER — Roland Daignault of the Fall River Amateur Radio Club said he's pleased that Kuss Middle School asked for its help.

"We're really thrilled to do this," said Daignault, who was at the school Thursday with other ham radio volunteers to help students and staff with a teleconference. This is the school's second year as an Explorer school of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which entitles the school to tap NASA resources through a multifaceted education program.

One aspect of the NASA Explorer program is an amateur radio club that the school started last year with the assistance of Daignault, Dave Neal, John Nery and other area ham radio operators. The Fall River Amateur Radio Club advised the school on what equipment it needed to be connected to the International Space Station.

"We have all the equipment to talk to the astronauts on the ISS. They just need to fit us into their schedule. It could happen this summer. We're ready to roll," Daignault said.

For Thursday's teleconference with Nicholas Lance at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, members of the Fall River club ran cable from science teacher Joseph Cote's second-floor classroom to the school library. Lance is an engineer with NASA who trains astronauts to be ham radio operators.

Five Kuss students have succeeded in passing a test that allowed them to receive amateur radio licenses. One of them, Shantae Martins, is president of the Ham Radio Club at Kuss. At the end of the teleconference, she and Megan DeSouza, vice president, thanked Lance and presented him with a T-shirt making him an honorary member of the club.

"I will wear it proudly," said Lance, who told the students, parents and staff in attendance that he really enjoys working with students.

Shantae, a seventh-grader, earned her license a year ago. She said she had heard much about ham radio and, "It seemed like a lot of fun to talk to people around the world." After college, Shantae said, she

thinks she'd like to work for NASA because it offers many opportunities.

All five Kuss students with ham radio licenses are girls, but Shantae said there are a couple of boys who are very close to passing the test.

Vicki Dombek, a sixth-grader, earned her license in April. She said she decided to get it because she thinks ham radio is interesting and her teacher is very enthusiastic about it.

"The test was hard," Dombek said. She is now studying Morse Code so she can upgrade her license. Jackie Dombek, her mother, said she's impressed with how much her daughter and the other NASA cadets and Ham Radio Club members at Kuss are learning and how much they help each other.

Marisa Matton, a seventh-grader who also has a ham radio license, said, "It's fun and it's interesting. There are a lot of things you can do with it."

Two students, Lena LeGere and Katie Weiskotten, and their teacher, Danielle Hartkem, visiting from Central Park Middle School in Schenectady, N.Y., participated in the teleconference. Central Park is also a NASA Explorer School and last year it participated with Kuss in a NASA project in Virginia.

In January, Cote and several Kuss students traveled to Schenectady to participate in an ISS project with Central Park students. LeGere is staying with Kuss student Kaylee Penland and Weiskotten is staying with Kuss student Ahiesha Borges.

"Our two schools have a similar environment," Hartkem said. During the visit, students from both schools were scheduled to go to Space Day at Framingham State College and the Boston Science Museum.

Rosemary Millham, who is NASA's education liaison for both Kuss and Central Park, said the program increases learning experiences in mathematics, science, engineering, geography and other subjects for students, and provides teachers with professional development workshops.

Millham said the Fall River Amateur Radio Club has provided invaluable service to Kuss. Not only do members come to the school every week



HERALD NEWS PHOTO | JACK FOLEY

Above, Kuss Middle School Radio Club President Shantae Martins, right, amuses and entertains club Vice President Megan DeSouza and John Nery of the Fall River Amateur Radio Club and Bristol County Repeater Association as she signals Morse code with a practice key. Below, Nick Lance of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration speaks to Kuss students during a teleconference.

to work with students and help them prepare for the licensing test, but they also serve on the steering committee for the program.

Since the NASA program is only a three-year commitment, Millham said Kuss is fortunate to have local ham radio operators to sustain it. Millham is also a licensed amateur radio operator.

"The momentum is really building now," Daignault said. "Now that we have enough kids who are licensed, they bring other kids into it to talk on the radio."

Daignault said he and Neal talk daily on the radio with Kuss students.

Students who double as ham radio operators often have family members work with them daily, Daignault said, but at Kuss most students only have volunteers from the Amateur Radio Club to help

them once weekly.

Daignault and Neal said at first they had to draw the kids out when they talked to them via radio, but now there are several students with radios at home who are comfortable conversing.

"Are we doing them a favor?" Daignault asked. "They're doing us a favor. The kids use a lot of technology, they meet a lot of people and they see and do things they would not do otherwise."

"It's definitely a hobby you can be passionate about. But for us, this brings people into ham radio."

Jill Boyarko, Kaylee Penland's mother, said the NASA Explorer School program is beneficial to students. "It's a great opportunity for these kids," she said.



Budget figures still murky on eve of Town Meeting

JEFFREY D. WAGNER
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD NEWS

FREETOWN — To vote for a Proposition 2 1/2 override or not to vote for one?

That is the question Annual Town Meeting voters will mull Monday as they head to Apponequet Regional High School in Lakeville for a 7 p.m. Town Meeting that was postponed from its original date last month because of overcrowding at Freetown Elementary School.

Although the high school gymnasium can accommodate more than 1,000 voters, Town Clerk Jacqueline A. Brown is urging voters to register by 5 p.m.

Town officials are expecting a large turnout once again as they continue debating whether the town will need a tax override to balance the budget or can approve a budget reinstating 25 laid-off teachers at the elementary school and avoiding other personnel lay-

FREETOWN

dfs.

The Board of Selectmen, with Mark Reich of the law firm Kopelman & Paige, met with department heads Friday to discuss the Finance Committee's budget, which according to Finance Committee Chairman George L. Grunwald nearly balances and will not require voters to consider a tax override.

While the Finance Committee voted 3-1 against an override Tuesday, selectmen and other department heads lambasted the Finance Committee budget on Friday, claiming it falls short of a balanced budget by about \$200,000.

Town officials claimed the Finance Committee budget would not restore laid-off positions at the elementary school and would produce personnel layoffs in other departments.

Selectmen and department heads Friday said they do not

support the Finance Committee budget and will likely continue to work with the figures on the floor of Town Meeting. Selectman Chairman John Laronda Jr. said he hopes if voters approve an override, it will be to cover around \$300,000, so the town will not be forced to reduce personnel and taxpayers will not be overburdened with a higher tax rate.

"Some of these cuts — I don't think they're going to happen," Laronda said of the Finance Committee's recommendations.

Meanwhile, Reich advised the town that approving an unbalanced budget, although possible, is perilous if the town fails to appropriate additional funds later.

"An unbalanced budget is a dangerous thing," he said.

Laronda, who scheduled Friday's emergency meeting, said some Finance Committee recommendations will produce personnel reductions in the

building department and treasurer's office.

Town officials claimed the committee's recommendations predicted more revenue than the town could generate by not paying health insurance for laid-off personnel at the elementary school.

The Finance Committee budget also predicted the town will obtain more revenue through a circuit breaker account in which the state reimburses communities with a high special education population. While Freetown's special education population has risen in recent years, the special education account for fiscal 2006 is expected to increase by \$200,000 to \$1.1 million, according to School Committee Chairwoman Lisa A. Pacheco.

Pacheco also said the anticipated circuit breaker money is not guaranteed by the state.

Pacheco, who staunchly defended the school budget and especially raises for depart-

ment personnel, said the raises are insignificant, totaling \$115,000.

Pacheco also said because the Town Meeting was postponed last month and the school district is obligated to notify personnel by June 15 of planned layoffs, the Freetown Elementary School Committee was forced to adhere to the selectmen's original budget. That budget reduced funding for the school by \$915,000.

Because of this, Pacheco said, the committee forwarded 25 layoff notices to teachers and now anticipates 38 students per classroom and a staff of just 16 teachers for more than 500 students.

"That's unheard of," Pacheco said.

It was disclosed Friday that the proposed fiscal 2006 budget will not be affected by the recent Bristol County Superior Court ruling that Freetown owes nearly \$5 million to K.R. Rezendes and Peter Borges

after the Board of Health lost a fly ash lawsuit to the parties in 2001.

Laronda allayed fears of department heads by promising selectmen will examine all possible options to compensate for this economic setback.

In addition to grappling with financial issues, Town Meeting voters Monday will be asked to enact the federal Senior Work-off Program. That program would enable senior citizens to claim tax vouchers in return for volunteer work in the community.

Voters will also be asked to lower the age requirement for seniors eligible for tax exemptions from 70 to 65.

Voters will also be asked to eliminate health insurance benefits for part-time elected officials.

Town residents can review the full 41-article Town Meeting warrant online at <http://town.freetown.ma.us>.

Town will boost cemetery plot prices by 50 percent on June 15

DEBORAH ALLARD-BERNARDI
HERALD NEWS STAFF REPORTER

SOMERSET — The price of purchasing a cemetery plot in town will soon increase by 50 percent.

The Board of Selectmen recently voted unanimously to raise the cost of a plot from \$300 to \$450, effective June 15.

"We've been holding the same prices since 1989," said

SOMERSET

town Treasurer Edmund J. Lima.

Lima, who proposed the increase to the board after researching prices in other area cemeteries, said the increase is needed to pay for cemetery upkeep and maintenance.

"We have to build up that

kitty again," said Lima. "We did a real survey on this."

For example, the Roman Catholic Church-operated St. Patrick's Cemetery in Somerset charges \$495 for a plot. Some cemeteries in Fall River charge \$600 for a plot, or two plots for \$1,000.

Plot increases will affect two town-owned cemeteries — the

old Nathan Slade Cemetery, and the new 11.5-acre Nathan Slade Cemetery.

Two other cemeteries in town have been sold out for many years.

With a new price of \$450, Lima said \$225 will be transferred to the cemetery account, and \$225 will benefit upkeep and maintenance.

By Monday, Lima said he had already received six telephone calls from people hoping to purchase cemetery plots at the current cheaper rate before the higher rate takes effect.

"A lot of people have been doing pre-funerals," said Lima.

Lima said the plot increases have been under consideration for several months, but with projected property tax

increases in town and building department fees, he said he opted to delay, providing town residents with an opportunity to purchase plots at a lower rate.

"We were trying to stall off this one as long as we could," said Lima.

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