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Steven Stamps of Rochester peers through a microscope at bits of "moon rock" in Oakland University's Space and Aviation Center.

OU space center becomes model across nation

Based on the success of an Oakland University program, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is setting up space education centers around the country.

More than 3,000 children and hundreds of adults have visited the OU Space and Aviation Center, which was established as a model project 18 months ago.

"It's kindled much more enthusiasm in schools for science," said David Housel, OU assistant education professor and head of the center.

"We've been trying to do that for a while and finally hit on something that works."

ALTHOUGH OU's center is the only one in Michigan, NASA has opened up new centers in the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, in Minnesota, and at the University of Wisconsin.

NASA hopes to eventually have 200 centers across the United States.

Based in O'Dowd Hall's Instructional Materials Center, OU's Space and Aviation Center contains samples of moon rock, more than 3,000 slides, more than 200 videotapes of space missions, and 30 new 16mm films that can be taken out on loan.

Also in the center are several hundred books on NASA programs. New this year are documentaries captioned for the hearing impaired.

Requests for videotapes of NASA missions have come from as far away as the Upper Peninsula.

USED MOSTLY by educators, the Space and Aviation Center is open to the public. Visitors include Scout

groups, school classes and just drop-ins. "University students are captivated by the center," observed Laura Snider-Feldmesser, who is in charge of its daily operation.

"And we get a few aerospace buffs in. It's fun to meet them."

Housel said the center has helped educate people about space missions and NASA. The professor said most see the agency as a builder of rockets when actually NASA conducts extensive research on the oceans, energy use, and other areas as well as space exploration.

The favorite topics of the children are the shuttle missions, the moon rocks and learning how to fly.

STILL BUILDING its collection, the center is looking for contributions from area residents. Sought are collections of old technical magazines with articles on aviation.

"We're interested in anything on aviation, astronomy, energy research, space or futurism — the future uses of technology," said Housel.

Unlike other NASA projects, the OU Space and Aviation Center has a collection of children's literature about space. All the latest books are included. "It's a super way for teachers to find out what's available," Housel explained.

Housel, who offers rocketry and space workshops for area teachers and children, would like to see more people make use of the OU facility.

The OU Aviation and Space Center is open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday, and 1-5 p.m. Saturday.

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