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“Reach for the Starts: Kanawha students speak to Space Force guardian”. By Evan Bevins (Staff Reporter)

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Davisville – The guest at Kanawha Elementary School on Tuesday showed third-graders a picture of a desolate rock formation and asked what they thought it was.

One suggested a landslide. Another said a battlefield.

A couple considered with whom they were speaking and made the correct guess: the surface of Mars.

Lt. Col. Christopher Evey, a guardian in the U.S. Space Force, spoke virtually with third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders at the school, explaining how the math and science they’re learning translates into careers like his and others. For example, geologists are studying images like the one he shared to learn more about the Red Planet.

“This is very similar to some things we see here on Earth,” Evey said. “It’s not just all math and spacecraft; there’s other sciences we can use that you might want to consider for your future careers.”

Evey spent 18 years in the Air Force before joining the Space Force, which was formed in 2019 as a distinct military branch. It’s organized under the Department of the Air Force in a similar manner as the Marine Corps under the Department of the Navy.

An engineer, Evey has worked designing and building spacecraft, satellites, and rockets. He sent videos in advance for the students to view and fielded questions from them about a variety of topics.

Third-grader Anna-Belle Johnson asked if the Space Force had cameras that could watch people. Evey said there are cameras attached to satellites that can be used to make maps or gather information on everything from flood control to agricultural issues.

“How do you drive a spaceship?” asked third-grader Dreyden Kirk.

Evey said the space shuttles formerly used by NASA were operated by people with the assistance of computers. Satellites are operated from control centers and follow coding to perform the mission and keep the equipment operational, like maintaining its orbit.

“The closer something is to Earth and the upper atmosphere, it will pull something down into the atmosphere and it will burn up,” Evey explained.

One of the videos Evey sent involved the Falcon Heavy rocket build by the private company SpaceX, parts of which are reusable. Third-grader Owen McFee asked how long it took to build.

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Evey, who has visited the California factory where the work was done, said it generally takes eight to 12 months to build a rocket booster, while satellites take two to three years to construct

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“If it’s brand new, you have to come up with a design,” he said. “You’re talking probably four to six years that it takes to design a space system.”

Third-grader Kaden Hamerick asked if people have to take a test to join Space Force. Evey said there are tests for ever branch of the military. He likened it to the exams students face and how they prove their knowledge and help determine the classes they take as they move forward.

“Everybody has to take tests, and it all really kind of builds up to what choices you’re going to have,” he said.

Third-grader Nic Walker enjoyed the presentation, including when Evey used a map to show students where he lives in Virginia compared to the location of their school and some rocket launch sites.

“You got to see all the places and where he lived and where the NASA places are,” Walker said. “I think I might be a space guardian when I’m older.”

Kanawha Principal Matt Null said he appreciated the opportunity for the students to speak with Evey in an activity that combined several subject areas.

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