

# GeoFORCE Texas selects first class

A total of 36 Southwest Texas eighth graders have been selected as the first participants in GeoFORCE Texas, an initiative aimed at encouraging budding young scientists to consider careers in the geosciences.

Sponsored by the University of Texas at Austin's Jackson School of Geosciences and Southwest Texas Junior College, GeoFORCE Texas received a total of 118 applications for this year's inaugural summer academy. Shell Oil Company provided the initial corporate funding for the academy. ConocoPhillips and the SBC Foundation have now

joined the program and are providing financial assistance to sustain and expand it.

"The response was terrific and we want to thank all the students and teachers who took the time to apply," Southwest Texas Junior College Dean of Technology and Institutional Advancement Blaine Bennett said. "Students selected for the first GeoFORCE Texas class are an outstanding group and I feel certain they will represent Southwest Texas well."

Area students selected for the program are: Siobhain Alvarado, Jairo Chavez and Justin Trevino from Newman Middle School in Cotulla; Steven Cason and Rosalie Rodriguez from Mary Harper Middle School in Dilley; and Jonathan Cubriel, Benjamin Martinez and Karina Robledo from Pearsall Junior High.

According to Bennett, 15 school districts from across SWTJC's 11-county service area had students submit applications. Students selected come from 12 different communities including Brackettville, Camp

Wood, Cotulla, Crystal City, Del Rio, Dilley, Eagle Pass, Hondo, Pearsall, Rocksprings, Sabinal and Uvalde.

Through weeklong summer academies that include geology-based field trips, research projects and course work led by university professors, GeoFORCE Texas hopes to expose students to the geosciences in ways that inspire and motivate them to actively pursue geology as a future course of study.

Students selected for the program are committed to attend GeoFORCE Texas summer academies for the next four years. Preference in the selection process was given female and minority applicants, two groups that are significantly underrepresented among current geologists. There is no cost to students who were selected for the program.

The itinerary for the first summer academy, scheduled July 16 through 27, calls for students to begin with three days on the UT Austin campus for

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classes and tours of local geological sites, followed by a trip to the U.S. Geological Survey headquarters in Reston, VA., and additional field trips to various geological sites and national park facilities across New Mexico.

An orientation session is scheduled April 23 at the SWTJC Uvalde campus to outline plans for this summer's academy to selected students and their parents.

According to Jackson School of Geosciences Asso-

ciate Director Doug Ratcliff, GeoFORCE Texas will recruit additional applicants for the program on an annual basis.

"Our program is patterned after a very successful program that has had tremendous success for over 20 years at

Fort Valley State University in Georgia," Ratcliff said. "With continued support from Shell, ConocoPhillips, SBC and others, we believe GeoFORCE Texas will be equally successful for many years to come."