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SERVING FRIO AND LA SALLE COUNTIES

THURSDAY
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Local students named to GeoFORCE program

Three area students are among the 40 outstanding Southwest Texas rising ninth graders recently selected for the GeoFORCE Texas 2007 summer academy.

Abel Freitas and James Carlos White of Pearsall, along with David Obregon of Dilley, were chosen for the summer program designed to inspire students to pursue careers in the geosciences.

The University of Texas at Austin Jackson School of Geosciences manages the GeoFORCE program in partnership with Southwest Texas Junior College. This year, the program received more than 125 applications from 16 school districts throughout Southwest Texas.

Other area students from Brackettville, Camp Wood, Carrizo Springs, Crystal City, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Hondo, Knippa, La Pryor, Leakey, Rocksprings and Uvalde were selected for the 2007 class.

The application process requires students to submit a personal essay, letter of recommendation and a personal statement expressing their qualifications for the program. Educators from each district in SWTJC's 11-county service area assist the program in recruiting students.

Doug Ratcliff, director of outreach and international programs at the Jackson School, noted that community support for GeoFORCE Texas continues to grow.

"We can see that the communities are behind the students and this is crucial to making this a rewarding experience for all who are involved," Ratcliff said.

SWTJC Dean of Technology and Institutional Advancement Dr. Blaine Bennett echoed Ratcliff's sentiments.

"This year we had more applicants than ever and we want to thank all the students, parents and teachers who took time to complete the application process," Bennett said. "I also want to encourage all applicants not selected for the summer academy to take advantage of the young geoscientists field study they will be invited to participate in later this summer."

GeoFORCE Texas encourages students with a high aptitude in math and science to consider careers in the geosciences. The week-long summer academies offer a blend of college preparatory coursework with hands-on field trips to sites of geological interest around the country, at no cost to the students.

Students selected for the program are committed to attend summer academies for four years throughout high school with trips

to Washington, D.C., the Grand Canyon, Mt. St. Helens and the Pacific Coast. Students will also have the opportunity to compete for GeoFORCE scholarships and internships after their final summer academy.

Qualified applicants not selected for the summer academy track are invited to participate in the Young Geoscientists Field Course. Similar to the summer academies, the field course includes both coursework and hands-on field work in the Uvalde area, Port Aransas, Austin and Houston.

Funding for GeoFORCE Texas comes from industry sponsors including Shell Oil, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, AT&T, Minerals Management Services, Dominion, Halliburton, Swift Energy Company, Marathon Oil, Schlumberger and Alcoa.

Their financial assistance supports the program's long-term goals of increasing the number of students - especially minorities and females - who enter into the geosciences and promoting awareness of the importance of Earth science in everyday life.

With this year's recruits, total participation in GeoFORCE Texas now stands at 240 students. When fully operational, the program will engage more than 1,000 Southwest Texas students across all grade levels.

This year's Ninth Grade Academy will be held July 14-21 and will visit The University of Texas at Austin campus where students will stay in dorms and attend professor-led classes. The group will then travel to Washington, D.C., to meet professionals at the U.S. Geological Survey in Reston, Virginia. While in D.C., students will tour the Smithsonian Natural History and Air & Space museums, the U.S. Capitol, and visit the Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam memorials.

A Ninth Grade Academy orientation session for students and parents will be held April 14 on the SWTJC campus in Uvalde.

For more information about the program, contact Julie Spink, program coordinator at the Jackson School of Geosciences, at jpink.jsg.utexas.edu or visit the GeoFORCE Texas website at <http://www.jsg.utexas.edu/geoforce/>.