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Boosting the sciences

May the GeoFORCE be with you could certainly apply to the 40 southwest Texas ninth-graders who recently completed a summer academy aimed at budding scientists.

A collaborative initiative designed by the University of Texas at Austin's Jackson School of Geosciences and Southwest Texas Junior College, GeoFORCE Texas increases awareness of the geosciences and motivates participation in experiences outside the classroom.

For example, this year's academy included travel to Austin, Washington, D.C. and New Mexico where students heard presentations by leading scientists on topics ranging from the Mars landing mission to volcanoes and tsunami research.

The group of 40 also took field trips to areas of geologic interest in the Austin area, Harper's Ferry and the Great Falls National Park in Virginia, the monuments and Smithsonian Museums in Washington, D.C., and Bandolier and Carlsbad Caverns National Parks in New Mexico.

"You represent some of the best and brightest science talent in our area, and I congratulate each and every one of you on a job well done," SWTJC dean of Technology and Institutional Advancement Blaine Bennett told the group at a July 27 graduation ceremony.

Indeed. At a time when American educators are lamenting the shortage of students with an aptitude for the sciences and mathematics, GeoFORCE promises to take a proactive role in exposing young people to the adventurous side of what may be thought of as an otherwise dry subject in the classroom.

Thanks to Shell Oil Company, ConocoPhillips, SBC Foundation and Priority Oil & Gas Company for helping underwrite the cost of the project. And thanks to educators for having the vision to create such a stimulating program.

This year's participants will continue with the academy next summer in a program slated for the Grand Canyon. A new group of ninth-graders will be chosen to take up where this year's students left off.

If you have a science-minded youngster in your household, it would be wise to begin planning their application now. You never know, the GeoFORCE might be with you, too.