

Long Beach Press-Telegram

NASA grant, CSULB help take Long Beach girls to Kennedy Space Center

By Alexandra Baird, Staff Writer

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Long Beach fifth-grade girls at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

LONG BEACH - It's not every day an 11-year-old girl answers a math question posed by an astrophysicist. But then, Ashley Kim isn't your everyday 11-year-old.

At the NASA Learning Experience for Elementary School Girls, the group was asked a series of brain teasers. Kim saw the pattern: digital roots. When they said "35," she knew the answer was 8. She yelled it out before anyone else. "I knew it when he went over a few problems and I figured out what he did," said Kim, a Stevenson Elementary School student. "I took a chance and I got it."

Kim was one of 30 fifth-grade girls from Long Beach schools chosen for a trip to Kennedy Space Center in Florida, July 26 through 30.

Lily Gossage is director of recruitment and retention at the Cal State Long Beach College of Engineering. She wrote the proposal that landed a grant from NASA for the program. Of the 22 universities that applied for the grant, nine were chosen.

Gossage said she chose youth that wouldn't normally get to take part in such an educational experience.

"I chose girls specifically because we have a strong focus on women in engineering at Cal State Long Beach," Gossage said. "The unique part of it was that the girls all came from underrepresented households, not the kind of families that could usually afford such a trip."

The girls were chosen from Stevenson, Roosevelt, International, Chavez and Edison Elementary Schools. Each was in the top 10 percent of her class and recommended by a teacher or principal.

On the trip the girls toured the space station, participated in workshops, met astronauts and watched a rocket launch.

Gossage said the goal was to foster girls' interest in math, science and engineering. She hopes to keep in touch with the girls over the next seven years to see if they go on to study at universities.

For Kim, the trip solidified her dreams.

"It gave me more knowledge," she said. "It persuaded me to be an engineer and learn more about math and science."

alexandra.baird@presstelegram.com, 562-499-1283



Long Beach fifth-grade girls at the Kennedy Space Center; one poses with a copy of the Press-Telegram.