

Learning is ‘rocket science’ for Starbase Atlantis Pearl Harbor graduates

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About 30 students from the fifth grade at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School celebrated their graduation from the Starbase Atlantis program with a rocket launching at Ford Island, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH), on Feb. 8.

While Starbase Atlantis, the Navy's wing of DoD [Department of Defense] Starbase, recognized its 100,000th student at its site in Pensacola, Fla., Starbase Atlantis Pearl Harbor held a graduation ceremony and rocket launch for its 286th class near the Pacific Aviation Museum hangar.



About 30 students from Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary celebrate their graduation from the Starbase Atlantis program with a rocket launching at Ford Island, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH).

“It’s a celebration of the fact that the Navy has been working with fifth grade students for 17 years and we’ve graduated 100,000 students,” said Joseph Barrett, director of Starbase Atlantis Pearl Harbor. “We introduce them to the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and math. We hope that we’ve encouraged many of them to go on and get careers in those subjects,” he said.

The Starbase program was brought to the Navy in 1994 by now-retired Navy Vice Adm. Robert Kihune, who was then chief of naval education and training. Kihune saw the benefits of Starbase, the original name, and wanted to incorporate it into the Navy. He now serves as chair of the board of trustees of Kamehameha Schools.

Kihune emphasized the importance of the Starbase Atlantis program. “To provide our students with how STEM is applied in our everyday lives requires that they be provided the opportunity to take part in hands-on programs such as Starbase Atlantis that not only stimulates their interest but that they become comfortable in a rapidly changing high-tech world,” Kihune said.

“There is no question that programs like Starbase Atlantis contribute significantly towards regenerating the interest in our young people to pursue careers in high tech and other STEM-related areas,” he continued.

The Pearl Harbor-based learning site contributed more than 7,000 graduates to the 100,000 total. Pearl Harbor Kai is one of two pilot schools that started in spring of 2002. The Feb. 8 class included 28 students who celebrated by launching their own model rocket that they built as part of the program.

Andre Roberts, 11, was one of the students who graduated from the program and successfully launched his rocket.

“My favorite part of the program was building the rocket and doing the flight simulator,” Roberts said.

Starbase Atlantis is the U.S. Navy's portion of the Department of Defense-sponsored Starbase Program,

an educational program focusing primarily on fifth grade students from local communities to motivate them in science and related fields. The program helps develop positive self-esteem, teaches goal-setting skill, and encourages teamwork through hands-on activities.

“It’s important to show the children what their engineering and technical learning can result in,” said Lt. Cmdr. Joe Lyon, the deputy director of the Naval Submarine Training Center Pacific (NSTC PAC).

NSTC PAC is the host command for the Starbase Atlantis Pearl Harbor program, providing instructors and guided tours of the sub-marine facility to the students.

“We have some of the finest Sailors in the fleet, very technologically savvy and successful,” Lyon said. “It’s good to give the Sailors the opportunity to help the kids and give back to the community and for the kids to see what it’s like to be an outstanding role model.”

According to Barrett, the Pearl Harbor site opened in 2002 and is one of 15 Navy Starbase sites. Each site had its own graduation event as part of the 100,000th student milestone celebration.