

Monday October 19, 1998

## NASA trip inspires teachers

By **LISA RODRIGUEZ**  
staff Writer

No one could say it better than John Glenn. A group of local teachers had been discussing the famous astronaut's very words just minutes before he said them during the Discovery 7 news conference Thursday in NASA's Teague Auditorium at Johnson Space Center in Houston. These science and math teachers, who were visiting NASA's annual open house, Inspection 98, had been explaining their purpose in making trip. But no one could say it like the 77-year-old national hero who became the first American to orbit the earth in 1962 and who will return to space in less than two weeks to participate in research he predicts will benefit everybody right here on earth. "At the conference, Glenn was the last to speak of the seven astronauts scheduled to fly with Discovery 7 on Oct. 29. They had been outlining for the media the research they were planning. "All of this is in application to you," said the United States senator. That is exactly the message many of these teachers said they hope to take back to their students. Teachers from Abilene and 16 other districts in the region gathered Wednesday after school to begin the seven-hour bus trip to Houston. Across a table at a Dairy Queen en route, Anita Graham, science teacher from Colorado City, said she hoped to bring back experiences that would give the kids a vision. "A lot of these kids haven't been past Abilene, except maybe to Dallas to see their grandparents, where they never left the house," she said. "I want to show them the opportunities that are available to them." All day Thursday and half of Friday these 28 teachers explored the NASA-developed technologies on exhibit at the Johnson Space Center, gathering resources and knowledge to take back to their classes. At the more than 200 exhibits on site, NASA employees drew in browsing teachers with stories and enthusiastic explanations of their work, handing out posters, stickers and badges for them to take home to students. "I wanted to find some things I could use to make math more interesting," said Haskell math teacher Norma Richardson, "to make it more relevant and more exciting for the kids." "I think there's a natural

Dr. Richard Thompson, assistant professor of physics and math at McMurry, said another part of the excitement of NASA was the integration of the sciences. After NASA, you don't walk into a building that says math or that says biology or that says physics," Thompson said. "It's all science. Science isn't a subject. It's a process for discovery." And for students, the possibilities extend far beyond their benefits as consumers. John Lineweaver, seventh-grade science teacher at Mann Middle School, said he hoped to relay to his students the exciting jobs available at NASA. Lineweaver, who has taught for more than 20 years, said he was inspired by a young engineer who was working as a guide for the event. When he asked her what she did for NASA she expected her to say she was a tour guide, he said. "I couldn't believe she was an engineer," he said. "She looked like one of my driver ed students." She was so excited," he continued. "She said she hated science as a kid but had a teacher that really turned her on to it." "I was listening to what that girl said. We need to do a better job in the classroom. It's really an awesome position to be in—the power that you have to influence positive or negative." The divers working in the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory where astronauts train underwater also impressed Lineweaver. "They get paid for having fun," he said. Lineweaver plans to relay these stories to his students. "Scientists are not just these old guys with big Coke-bottle glasses," he said. Other teachers said they were encouraged by the stories they heard from NASA employees, many of whom contribute to the corporation with little more education than a high school diploma. One of the Buoyancy Lab divers said he didn't have a college education, but he wouldn't trade his job for the world. Another "rude" said he had worked for NASA for 16 years and is now traveling the world negotiating international simulator contracts. He also has not earned a college education, he said. Jimmie Bell, science teacher from Colorado City, said she was encouraged by NASA's willingness to train hard workers with diverse experience, despite the extent of their education. Graham said, "Anybody can work for NASA if they want to and if they keep working. They don't have to have a doctorate degree." **Gaile**

attraction to the idea of space," said Kathy Hale, math specialist for the Region 14 Education Service Center. "If this triggers (students') curiosity, then it's worth your time to get here."But Hale said teachers would bring home more than curriculums, web sites and project ideas."It's the connections we can come up with—what they do here and what the kids can see in their own lives," she said. Dr. Gary Wilson, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for McMurry University, said the reality of the space program is one of in most enticing elements."so many of the hard problems of living in space and traveling through space can help solve some of the hard problems here," he said.Curt Brown, commander for the Discovery 7 flight, unknowingly reiterated Wilson's point during the news conference."There is no area of modern industry that hasn't been affected by our space program," he said.For example, perhaps students don't know the diapers their younger siblings wear are products of space research, as are the invisible braces that straighten their teeth or the smoke detectors in their homes.

**Thompson, science consultant for Region 14 Service Center, said trips like this provide teachers with education and inspiration they will funnel back into their classrooms."When you show these teachers science in the real world, it gives them the knowledge to go back and point kids in the right direction," said Thompson, who is a former science teacher. "It also keeps them updated."Thompson said teachers also trade ideas when they get together."There's a camaraderie," she said. "I think they become better teachers."Thompson organized the trip with a Regional Collaborative for Excellence in Science Teaching grant sponsored by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas."These people are good teachers," she said, And this kind of experience just fires up their passion."Lisa Rodriguez may be reached at 676-677 or rodriguez1@abinews.com**

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