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TOP STORY

NEW: MRGS Teacher Presents Star Research In Texas

Kelly Clark 21 hrs ago

A Shenandoah County science teacher finished a year spent reaching for the stars with a presentation in Texas last week.

Russell Kohrs, 37, and two students from Rockingham County presented their research on a galactic nuclei at the 229th Meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Grapevine, a suburb of Dallas, from Jan. 3 until Saturday.

Kohrs and his fellow participants shared posters and oral presentations of their research and 15 guest speakers from universities and institutes around the world.

Kohrs teaches environmental science at the Massanutten Regional Governor's School in Moorefield, Va. An active galactic nucleus is a region at the center of a galaxy that has an unusually high luminosity over part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

The research was part of the NASA/IPAC Teacher Archive Research Program, for which Kohrs was one of eight teachers nationwide to be chosen last year.

The program pairs three teachers with a mentor to study identification methods for the distant regions, some of which are up to 13 billion light years from Earth.

"We looked at star-forming regions," Kohrs said in a phone interview on Monday. "We came

a methodology for culling out young stars. We can use the data for distance measurements. The next step is to advocate for telescope time [at Caltech] and look at reverberation mapping studies.

The program is sponsored by NASA, the California Institute of Technology and the university's Infrared Processing and Analysis Center.

Kohrs was accompanied in Texas by Savannah Horton of Broadway High and Dana Jones of Ashby High, both 17.

The seniors are studying active galactic nuclei for their research projects at the Governor's School, Kohrs said. The trio spent last year conducting research at school and during a weeklong trip to Caltech in June.

Now that his role in the program is over, Kohrs's next step focuses on community outreach, including addressing the Rotary Club of Rockingham County later this month and creating professional development materials for area science teachers.

He called his work in the program "quite an accomplishment" and encouraged all teachers to participate for it.

"To be on site at NASA and to participate in research that is consequential and important for ... it's quite valuable," he said. "If every science teacher had the opportunity to do this as part of their preparations for teaching, it would be great for science education."

Kohrs taught earth science, geology and astronomy at Broadway High for 12 years before joining the Governor's School in 2015.

He also teaches geology at Lord Fairfax Community College in Front Royal and is chairman of the Virginia Association of Science Teachers's Earth Science Board.

Contact Kelly Clark at 574-6290 or kclark@dnronline.com



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