

Students' patches are space-bound

TO THE STARS

BY RUTH CAMPBELL

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Two Ector County ISD students — Celeste Ortega and Vivian Hernandez — will make history this fall when their mission **patches** head for the International **Space** Station as part of the **Student Space** Flights Experiment Program.

Mary Fulton, innovation instructional specialist, said the contest held in the district was open to all grades.

There also was a contest for an experiment to be blasted off into **space**. It was open to grades five through 12 and Swetha Kesavan's experiment won.

For the **patches**, there was an elementary and secondary winner. Ortega, a third-grader at E.K. Downing Elementary was the elementary winner and Vivian Hernandez, a sixth-grader at Crockett Middle School, was the

secondary winner.

"We did recognize as a district the top three from each division in the mission patch," Fulton said.

Campuses could choose two finalists and Fulton said there were 36 all together. Those 36 were put out in an online poll — with no names — and the district voted.

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Edward K. Downing Elementary School third grader Celeste Ortega, 9, poses for a photo recently at Downing Elementary School.

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Patches

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Fulton said seven medals were awarded because there was a tie for third place in the elementary division.

Ortega and Hernandez were both surprised by their wins. Ortega, who is 9, said her sister draws a lot and she wanted to be an artist.

"So I was like, this is my chance. I could probably do something super good," Ortega said. Ortega's patch includes an astronaut flying on the back of a rocket next to the moon. It has the 100 year anniversary for the district and the ECISD logo in it.

"I was so surprised. I didn't think I'd actually win because I only have one medal so far. So this would be my second medal — something big," Ortega said.

Her first medal was for flag football. "It's pretty cool that my patch is going to actually fly up to **space**," she said. It will be on an astronaut's shoulder. Ortega said **space** is one of her favorite subjects, along with math or science.

Vivian Hernandez is the daughter of Crockett seventh-grade art teacher Priscilla Hernandez. Vivian drew her patch design during science class. The district wanted the Ector County ISD logo and 100 years to mark its 100th birthday this year.

Principal Maribel Aranda said not everyone has this experience.

Vivian said she was surprised she was chosen.

The second place winner at Crockett, sixthgrader Georgina Nunez, is one of Vivian's friends, Aranda said. Aranda said entering the mission patch contest is voluntary. She added that it was hard to choose the best ones from her campus. They were sent to the ECISD Innovation Department which voted and selected one. One patch from the elementary and one from the secondary will head to **space**. The campus has a selection of patch designs up on one of the walls in the hallway.

Vivian said she knows the patch is going into **space**, but it seems surreal to her.

Fulton said their **patches** and experiment will fly later this year. Communities directly impacted by the war in Ukraine will fly later.

The launch is tentatively scheduled for October from Cape Fulton said.

Asked if she had to include science because her science teacher, Pam Hansen, was standing next to her, Ortega said, "No it's because it's fun."

Principal Lindsey Lumpkin said the **patches are** taken to an embroiderer and a custom patch is made.

Lumpkin said she was thrilled that one of her students won. When she was principal of Falcon Early College High School, now Odessa Collegiate Academy, theirs was the first science experiment from Ector County to go to the International **Space** Station.

Ortega had a fairly large contingent of family with her at the ECISD Board of Trustees meeting when she was presented with her certificate and medal.

Lumpkin said West Texas is known for oil, heavy traffic and mobile children.

"But our families who **are** here, who **are** rooted and grounded, these kids deserve just the same opportunities as the kids in Houston ISD, as Dallas ISD as Washington, D.C. ... The more opportunities that we can expose them to, the better off they **are**. Their imaginations run wild. They have lots of opportunities to go to college out of state; travel," Lumpkin said.

Downing and Crockett **are** planning to raise money so both girls can watch the rocket launch that will send their **patches to space**.

As with Ortega, Vivian Hernandez said winning the mission patch contest was one of the last things she expected.

Left: Vivian Hernandez, right, speaks about creating her flight patch design for the **Student Spaceflight Experiments Program Mission 16 Space Flight** as her mother and art teacher Priscilla Hernandez, left, listen recently in the Crockett Middle School cafeteria. **Bottom left: Edward K. Downing Elementary School third grader Celeste Ortega, 9,** poses for a photo with her spaceflight patch design recently at Downing Elementary School.



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Canaveral. The conference where students present to scientists at the Smithsonian will be postponed until next year,

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