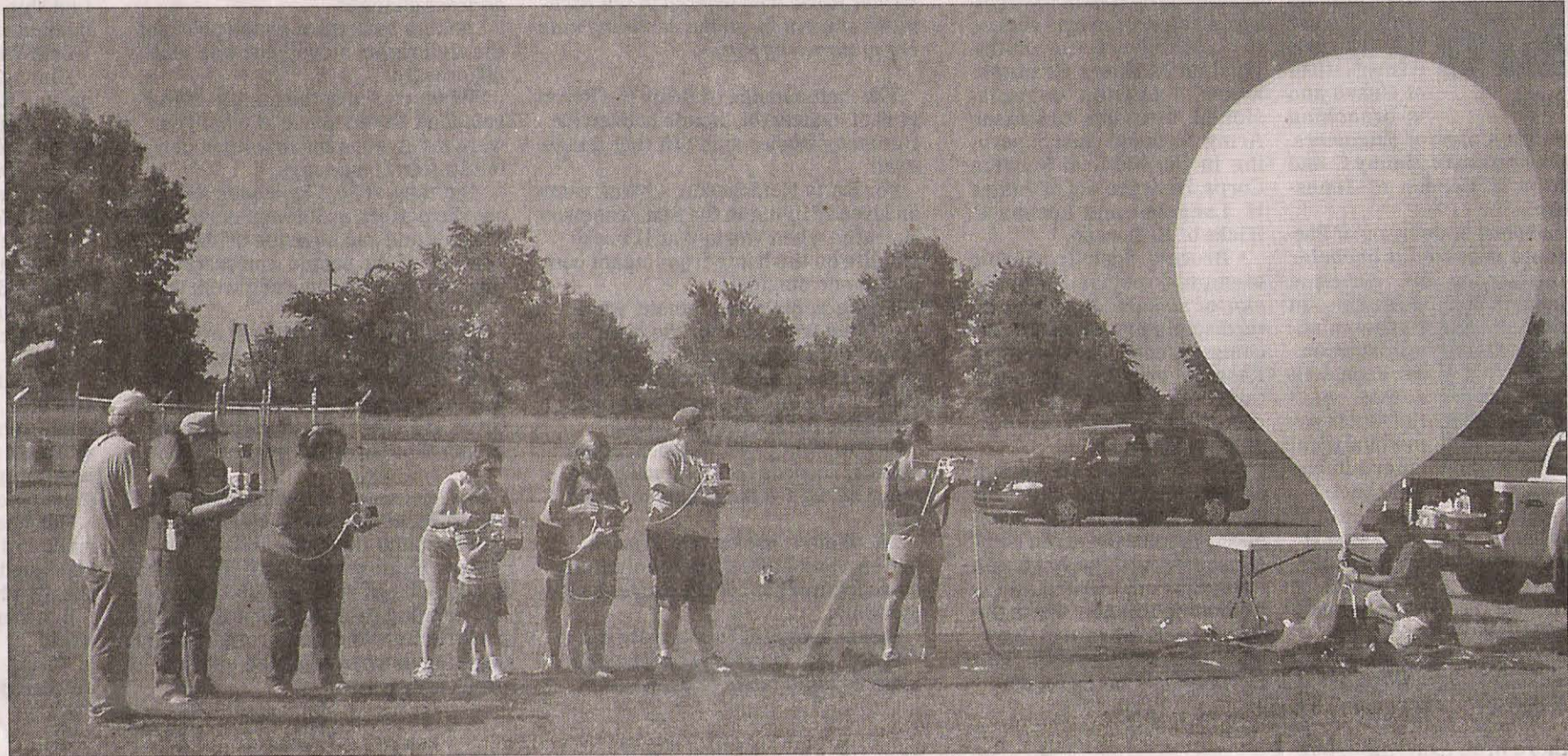


# Science outreach wraps up big year

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO,  
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SPECIAL TO THE SUN



A balloon is launched from the Cross County High School campus west of Cherry Valley in July. Teachers and the general public participated in the launch.

Marty Huss | Special to The Sun

**JONESBORO** — For Arkansas State University's efforts in science outreach to the general public, 2007 was an extraordinary year.

What follows is just a sample of some of those accomplishments and plans for the immediate future, as well as some of the accolades received by faculty and students.

This past summer Dr. Susan Allen, Department of Chemistry and Physics, was named to the National Medal of Science Committee by President Bush. This panel of 12 distinguished scientists decides on the annual winners of the National Medal of Science, which is the United States' highest award for scientific achievement.

Dr. Robyn Hannigan, also in chemistry and physics, was honored by the American Chemical Society with the 2007 Award for Encouraging Disadvantaged Students into Careers in the Chemical Sciences. This award is sponsored by the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation and was given to recognize the work that she has done to increase the number of underrepresented minorities and first-generation students in chemistry.

This past year also saw an increased outreach from the Department of Chemistry and Physics to area K-12

students with the introduction of the BalloonSAT Program. Directed by Dr. Tillman Kennon, assistant professor of science education, this NASA-funded program involves ASU scientists working with local high school teachers and students to build and fly scientific instruments on high-altitude weather balloons to heights of about 100,000 feet, which is where outer space begins.

Data retrieved during these flights are used by the students and scientists to investigate the upper reaches of our atmosphere. A picture from a past flight taken of Memphis from 80,000 feet recently graced the covers of *The Science Teacher*, a national journal for scientists.

### **EVS program**

Many master's and doctorate students of the Graduate Program in Environmental Sciences (EVS), which represents a diverse group of bright young scientists from

across the United States and the world, obtained nationally competitive fellowships in 2007. The EVS program has reached across the university to engage faculty with expertise in environmental history and geography through the redesign of the first-year curriculum, ensuring that students of the program are immersed in the complexities of environmental issues.

The EVS program's plans to engage students in environmental sciences from kindergarten through doctoral hopefuls are coming to fruition. The National Science Foundation recently awarded its faculty almost \$1 million to fund an undergraduate research and training program that engages first- and second-year students in interdisciplinary community-based research while integrating these skills across the curriculum.

These efforts, combined with outreach to K-12 classrooms, will ensure that many of Arkansas' children will be not only scientific-

ly literate, but also will have the skills and knowledge to lead the country to solve the most important issues of the day, such as agricultural sustainability and global climate change. As the EVS program continues to develop new educational programs at the undergraduate level and new training and outreach programs that link our faculty and graduate students to K-12 students and teachers, it will seek more input from the community on how it can serve the needs of Jonesboro and Arkansas.

### **Reaching out**

Our weekly column in *The Jonesboro Sun* continues to be published uninterrupted, reaching week No. 131 today. These articles are also reproduced by many other print media in the United States.

This week's radio program, "Science in the Natural State," is No. 96 in a series. The radio program is broadcast weekly by KASU

and many other radio stations across the country.

These articles and radio shows have been the product of a collective effort by dozens of people at ASU, increasing the profile of our university.

Seventeen TV programs showcasing the research carried out by ASU faculty and students have already been produced, are being broadcast locally and have found their way to the Internet. A series of science-based movies ("Science Flicks") also has been offered since August. These showings are followed by a group discussion of distinguished panelists.

### **Looking ahead**

The future looks even brighter. In 2007 the first class of ASU students trained in science communication graduated, and they will help to spread the word on public understanding of science. This was a course cross-listed between the Department of Biological

Sciences and the Environmental Science Program.

Early next year, in a joined project between the departments of Biological Sciences and Chemistry and Physics, a science exhibit will be inaugurated in the lobby of Lab Sciences Building East. This will be followed by other initiatives that will culminate with the celebration of the "Year of Science" in 2009. ASU is an active participant in those events.

We can say that when it comes to outreach activities in science at Arkansas State, the future is now.

For more information, contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at [biology@astate.edu](mailto:biology@astate.edu).

Dr. Romero is chairman of biological sciences at ASU. Dr. Pratte is chairman of the Department of Chemistry and Physics, and Dr. Hannigan is professor of geochemistry, director of the graduate program in environmental sciences and Judd Hill professor of environmental science.