

Garrison Space Project Launches Balloon

- By Bill Erickson

On Monday, June 17, 2013, a weather balloon launch at the **Garrison Middle School** football field in Walla Walla, WA, led the 20 female Hispanic students involved in the **Garrison Space Project** on a 120 mile chase across the Palouse region, ending eventually in the northwest corner of Whitman County.

The students and their van drivers, project coordinator Brent Cummings, Martin Fortney, and Jeremy Gradwohl, were helped by a chase crew of advisors: Frank Skorina from WWCC, Andrea Dobson, Marin Meades and Emma Dahl from Whitman College, and Bill Erickson from the Wa-Hi Latino Club. The students and advisors located the balloon several hours after it landed in a wheat field about a mile from the nearest road.

Prior to the launch, it took about an hour and a half to prep the camera platform and fill the balloon with 150 cubic feet of helium. The girls, with the help of Garrison Middle School science teacher Sue Schultz and retired Garrison science teacher Sue Parish, went through a checklist developed weeks before to make sure all the requirements and cameras were set before launch. This included a call into the FAA to provide a pre-flight notice of the high altitude balloon launch, which occurred at 10:30 am.

The students, who have been involved in the six week program that focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), chased the balloon through the Washington towns of Dayton, Dusty, Colfax, St. John, and Ewan, and eventually located the balloon just west of Rock Creek Lake in Whitman County.

During the balloon's four hour flight, it reached a maximum altitude of 105,835 feet or 20 miles. As a follow-up to the flight, the students will analyze data and review and edit the video taken during the flight. A final presentation will be made to their families, community members, and sponsors.

Student participants in the Garrison Space Project, are: Fatima Alvarado, Angie Alvarado, Yesenia Balderas, Angeles Hernandez, Rubi Lopez, Sarai Lopez, Cynthia Macias, Lizbeth Maya, Cynthia Montalvo, Isla Ortiz, Yolanda Osorio, Axel Patino, Jaelyn Pineda, Kimberly Pureco, Sonia Robles, Andrea Romero, Itzel Salazar, Diana Sandoval, Joycelyn Sotelo, and Samantha Vivanco. 3R's mentors are: Nallely Facio, Brenda Lopez, and Eduardo Duran

The project's mission was to develop an interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in Latina students at Garrison Middle School. Funding sources included an initial \$1500 grant from the Walla Walla chapter of the American Association of University Women (4 - GoPro Cameras), \$250 from Nelson Irrigation (GoPro Micro SD Cards), \$200 from Columbia REA (Camera chargers and battery packs), \$200 from Exploring Post 311 (First Fruits Fund via the Blue Mountain Community Foundation), and Valley Vision (donated anti-fog wipes for cameras).

In addition, Whitman College Outreach Coordinator Sue Burt provided funding to help transport the students to pre-launch educational opportunities in the community. Larry Dobson helped provide assistance with the rocket lab and camera mounts, and Whitman College astronomy/physics professor Andrea Dobson purchased the \$700 balloon kit.

