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Eighth-grader ready to dive into JASON Project

By TIFFANNIE BOND

VIEW STAFF WRITER

Lance Wright became interested in science because of his participation in the JASON

Project. This month, the Becker Middle School eighth-grader will travel to Santa Barbara, Calif., and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to study the ocean

and the fault lines that lie beneath it.

The JASON Project, founded by RMS Titanic discoverer Robert Ballard, engages students in real-life, real-time

science through live broadcasts in January and February.

Each year, 28 students and six to eight teachers are chosen as argonauts, named for

the mythical explorer Jason and his argonauts. They travel to exotic, snow-covered, desert and marine locales throughout the world in the
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name of science.

Students participate in a rigorous interview process locally and nationally before being chosen. Wright was one of three students from Clark County to be chosen for the finals. Each year since the school district began hosting the program, a teacher or student has traveled to the exhibition site.

"We're one of the few sites that have had someone every year. Very few sites have had someone every year, and we've been very fortunate," said Joyce Woodhouse, director of the School-Community Partnership Program, which

"I have some expectations to live up to, because Clark County is well known at JASON headquarters. They know we send the best up there."

LANCE WRIGHT
JASON PROJECT STUDENT ARGONAUT

facilitates the project.

Marcus Mason, a fifth-grade teacher at Fitzgerald Elementary, was chosen as a teacher argonaut this year.

"And we're very, very proud of them, too," Woodhouse said.

"I have some expectations to live up to, because Clark County is well known at JASON headquarters," Wright said. "They know we send the

best up there."

Wright knows he's in elite company. He's been watching local student argonauts for years.

"Just seeing students on the screen who weren't that much older than me working with real world scientists was amazing to me," Wright said. "I said 'I can do that.'"

Sharon Pearson, Wright's

fifth-grade teacher at Eisenberg Elementary, brought in student argonaut Eric Cummins when Wright was a student. For the last two school years, Wright has visited Pearson at Tarr Elementary, where she now teaches, to study the exhibitions of JASON.

Pearson hopes Wright has the same influence on her students this year as Cummins had on Wright.

"I have some of my kids come back a lot," Pearson said. "I tell them my door is always open."

Pearson won't take the credit for Wright's love of science, even though he is more than
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► JASON: Project broadcast at CCSN campus

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willing to do it out to her.

"Any time a teacher is excited about something anywhere in the curriculum, it helps get those kids motivated. It's the JASON project that keeps them motivated," said Pearson, who was a teacher argonaut in 1998. "If the information isn't there, and it isn't strong, they're not going to follow through with it."

"There's so much discovery. Math is pretty much discovered. There's not much more to discover there," Wright said. "Scientists discover something new every day."

Wright will spend Jan. 28 through Feb. 8 immersed in

science and working with scientists. He's been studying since last summer to keep up with the scientists he'll be working alongside.

"I've never had an opportunity to work with any real scientists," Wright said. "So, this will be my first experience to work with a scientist, and I'm very excited about that."

Wright came into Pearson's classroom after school for the last two years, because his middle school didn't have JASON in the curriculum. Cummins is now a student at the U.S. Naval Academy.

"Now tell me JASON doesn't have an impact on them," Pearson said. "JASON isn't something you find in a textbook. It's science right

now. When he (Wright) finds something that is of interest to himself, he pursues it. He's a neat kid. He's what we call a life-long learner."

Those interested in the JASON Project can visit the Web site at www.jasonproject.org. Free JASON live public broadcasts will be at 7 and 8:30 a.m. Monday through Feb. 7 and all day Feb. 1 at Community College of Southern Nevada, 3200 E. Cheyenne Ave. Those interested can call 799-6560.



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Teacher to join expedition

JASON project picks Fitzgerald educator

By TIFFANNIE BOND

VIEW STAFF WRITER

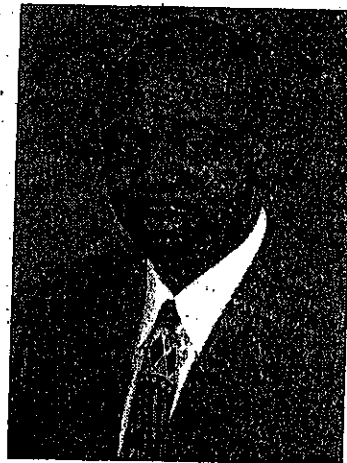
Marcus Mason wants to show his students at Fitzgerald Elementary you can succeed, no matter your environment.

This month the fifth-grade teacher will fulfill his goal by traveling to California's Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary on a two-week expedition with the JASON

Project. The program, created by RMS Titanic discoverer Robert Ballard in 1989, engages children nationwide via live televised expeditions to snow-covered, rain forest, marine or desert regions of the world. During the school year, students can further their explorations through the JASON Foundation for Education Web site.

Every year, teachers and students apply to be a member of the team that will bring the explorations to the students. After a rigid interview

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Marcus Mason

► JASON: Project created by Titanic discoverer

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process, essays and a classroom visit, Mason was chosen as one of eight teacher argonauts nationwide to participate.

The Clark County School District is one of the only JASON sites that has had someone chosen for the expedition every year. Students also are able to apply. This year, eighth-grader Lance Wright from Becker Middle School will be one of 28 to participate, said Joyce Woodhouse, director of the School-Community Partnership Program, which facilitates the project in Clark County.

"The competition is always very tough. It's even more with teachers because they only chose six to eight, and there are 36 sites," Woodhouse said. "Very few sites have had someone every year, and we've been very fortunate. And we just have good people. And we're very, very proud of them, too."

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to put a face to science for my students," Mason said. "That's the big challenge for a teacher, relating the experience to the

concepts. I enjoy making the connection between the concepts, and the kids really enjoy the science."

JASON, named for the mythical explorer Jason and his argonauts, is an interactive learning environment where science, math and technology are used to explore parts of the world many students will never see. Mason believes his teaching style is cohesive with JASON and will help him illustrate the power of knowledge to his students.

"Science — It's funny. It's serious. It's neat. It's abstract. It's everything they are doing," Mason said. "You don't have to have all the information. It's OK to question why. Most of all, have fun. I miss being a kid."

This year, Mason's school departmentalized, meaning he

only teaches writing to his students before they leave to attend math, science, social studies or language arts. But that doesn't stop him from relating science to writing. In the past, students have read "Journey to the Center of the Earth," acted out parts from the book and discussed areas such as plate tectonics, one of the areas Mason will be studying in California.

For more information on the JASON project, visit the Web site at www.jasonproject.org.