

May 6, 2009

A38

Opening eyes to hurricanes

BY JONATHAN STARKEY
Special to Newsday

Lt. Cmdr. Al Girimonte, a 1991 graduate of West Babylon High School, returned to Long Island yesterday at the controls of a Hurricane Hunter plane to stress storm preparedness as the hurricane season approaches.

Girimonte and his crew landed at Republic Airport about 9:15 a.m., piloting a WP-3D Orion, which Girimonte often flies into hurricanes to measure their strength and direction.

The event was part of a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hurricane Awareness tour that began yesterday in New Hampshire and will end in South Florida later this week. About 400 students from seven local schools learned how to prepare for a storm and toured the aircraft.

Girimonte said his mission at NOAA contrasts with his 11 years as a Navy pilot. "My whole life, I was taught to stay away from bad weather," he said. Now he flies the Hurricane Hunter into storms as 5,000 to 10,000 feet, where the crew drops devices called dropsondes to measure wind speed, pressure, humidity and temperature. Statistics are



PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

Lt. Cmdr. Al Girimonte with his niece Mikayla and nephew Joseph in the cockpit of a Hurricane Hunter yesterday.

rounded back to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Girimonte said he's flown into roughly 15 named storms, describing the feeling as "nervous excitement." Rain can be so heavy in a hurricane that it can feel as if you're underwater, until you reach the calm, white-walled eye. "You go from one of the most extreme weather

environments Mother Nature can give you to one of the most serene," he said.

Students were awestruck. "They told us what they do when they fly into the hurricane," said Richard McCarthy, 11, a sixth-grader at P.S. 47 in Queens. "Sounds fun, dangerous and cool."

Classmate Thomas Kelly, 12,

NOW ONLINE
See VIDEO of Lt. Cmdr. Al Grimonte as he and his crew land at Republic Airport.
NEWSDAY.COM

called the trip "fun and a great learning experience. It's cool."

"I always wondered how they got that information," said Leah Goodman, 16, an 11th-grader from Stella K. Abraham High School in Hewlett.

I. Ross D'Amico, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service forecast office in Upton, said the event was geared toward students living in areas that could experience the greatest damage from a hurricane. Getting students who have never lived through a major storm to prepare for one is not always easy, he acknowledged.

"Psychologically, they think it's not going to happen to them," he said. "The idea is to educate as much as we can."

Car to run on chocolate

LONDON — Scientists unveiled yesterday what they hope will be one of the world's fastest biofuel vehicles, powered by waste from chocolate factories and made partly of plant fibers.

Its makers hope the racer will go 145 mph and give manufacturers ideas about how to build more ecologically friendly vehicles.

The car runs on vegetable oils and chocolate waste that has been turned into biofuel. The steering wheel is made out of plant-based fibers derived from carrots and other root vegetables, and the seat is built of flax fiber and soybean oil foam. The body is also made of plant fibers. Scientists at the University of Warwick say their car is the fastest to run on biofuels and made from biodegradable materials. It has been built to Formula 3 specifications about the car's size, weight, and performance.

To date, their claims cannot be independently verified.

The car, named the "World-First Formula 3 racing car," will go on display at several races, including the European Grand Prix and Britain's Goodwood Festival of Speed.

— The Associated Press