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CONTEST "LET YOUR SCHOOL GO INTO ORBIT"– SPACE BAPTISM 2007

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RESUMEN

Bajo la organización del Mirador de la Ciencia del Parque Zoológico y Botánico Bararida y de la Asociación Larense de Astronomía, se realizó el concurso "Bautizo Espacial 2007", el cual brindó a estudiantes de la II y III etapa de educación básica la oportunidad de darle nombre propio a un asteroide. El propósito del concurso era entre otros, lograr la mayor difusión del conocimiento de las ciencias básicas y del espacio, a través de expresiones literarias donde los participantes pusieran de manifiesto su originalidad y creatividad, trabajando juntos y de manera solidaria. Como resultado, el asteroide (12758) 1993 SM3 será conocido de ahora en adelante como (12758) *Kabudarí*. El éxito de esta iniciativa se ha traducido en varias publicaciones regionales relacionadas con el concurso, los niños y las escuelas participantes. Existen planes en desarrollo para hacer nuevas ediciones del concurso para dos asteroides más.

ABSTRACT

The contest "Space Baptism 2007" was organized with the cooperation of the Mirador de la Ciencia, a science museum associated with the local zoo in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, and in collaboration with the Asociación Larense de Astronomía, a local astronomy amateur group. This contest was aimed at students of primary schools and had as a final award the chance to give a proper name to an asteroid. The ultimate goal of the contest was to promote basic and space sciences to children and the young through activities that involved the creation of stories related to astronomy, enforcing creativity and originality, and encouraging group work and solidarity. As a result, the asteroid (12758) 1993 SM3 will be known from now on as (12758) *Kabudarí*. The success of this initiative is demonstrated by stories about the contest that appeared in several publications in local newspapers and magazines about the school and the students who won the contest. We are currently developing plans for repetitions of the contest to name two more asteroids.

Key Words: education — outreach

1. PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

The project to name an asteroid (12758) 1993 SM3 came out in 1998 as an initiative by the Asociación Larense de Astronomía (ALDA). This project was suggested to the astronomer Orlando Naranjo, from Universidad de Los Andes (ULA). He had discovered various asteroids which have been named provisionally. Some other institutions from Venezuela that work for this region joined this project:

- Mirador de la Ciencia del Parque Zoológico y Botánico Bararida, represented by his coordinator Gilbert Sánchez.
- The UNESCO Associated Schools in Lara, PEAU-Lara, represented by Hector Suárez.
- Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Ciencia y la Tecnología in Lara State, FUNDACITE-LARA, represented by Cenobia Meleán.
- The Direction of Cátedras Libres at the Universidad Centroccidental Lisandro Alvarado, represented by the engineer Rafael Rodríguez.
- The customer attendance office of Parque Zoológico y Botánico Bararida, represented by Isbelia Istillarte.
- The Asociación Larense de Astronomía was represented by its President engineer Jesús Guerrero. We counted with the technical counsel of Licenciada Katherine Vieira, a professional astronomer.

2. PROCEDURE

First of all, professor Orlando Naranjo made a general review of the methodology and resources used to discover the asteroids. Then, we outlined the features of the contest. It was named "Let your school go into the orbit: Space Baptism 2007" and it would be carried out in two phases: the first phase took place during the school year 2005–2006, the advertising poster of the event was chosen. The contest in this phase was based on writing short stories

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about scientific topics in order to choose the asteroid's name. The aim was to offer the primary school and high school students from Lara State more than a contest. We mainly intended to achieve the major promotion of knowledge about the basic and space sciences through literate work so the participants expressed their originality and creativity, encouraging group work and solidarity. Moreover, as an incentive of the contest, the students created a scientific story in order to choose a name for the asteroid. They exalted the local and ethnical values of Lara, connected with their fauna, flora, geography, personalities and relevant events.

3. EXECUTION

The members of every institution involved in the project contributed to establish the basis of the contest. These bases were promoted through the written media (flyers, posters, and brochures), broadcasting (radio, the press, television) and digital media (publication in the website `www.tayabeixo.org`). Besides, lectures and encouraging events were hold and were sponsored by the networks PEAU-Lara.

The first phase of the contest took place, as well as the contest of the posters to promote the Space Baptism. Students of different institutions participated, the winners were: Yaiber Martínez, Pablo Domínguez and Brando Núñez. 2000 copies of the winning poster were printed in full color and distributed to the schools all over Lara, as part of the second phase of the contest. In addition, an up-dated list of the common nomenclature of the Minor Planet Center was prepared. The special mentions of the prizes were defined: originality, creativity and cooperation. Municipal committees were established for the reception and evaluation of the enrollment and written works in Lara. A jury composed by members of the organizing institutions deliberated on and chose the winning stories.

The big day of the award came. The organizers, counselors, sponsors, institutions, directors, teachers, relatives, classmates, all the people involved in the contest Space Baptism, children and teenagers (with all their enthusiastic spirit participated in the contest) were the winners due to their pleasure and joy of participating, sharing and letting their imagination fly. The prizes were given on May 17 at the Auditorio de la Biblioteca Pública Pío Tamayo. The Bolivarian School Don Vidal Hernández Aguero won the contest and presented the story entitled "The asteroid that fell down from the sky". It was written by the girls Mayendry Linarez and Mauriel Yépez and they won the literate contest and therefore, they won the privilege of naming the asteroid (12758) 1993 SM3 Kabudarí. The term Kabudarí comes from the Arawak language, an aboriginal ethnic group that already disappeared and it means big tree. The winners got additional prizes, donated by the contest's sponsors.

4. POSTERIOR ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE PLANS

One of the most satisfactory results of this contest was the publication of the book "Space Creators", a valuable compendium of all the stories participating in the contest. This book was elaborated by the editorial coordinator Licenciada Maruja Casanova. The illustration and images were designed by Mariana Sellanes and the support of FUNDACITE-Lara, which recognizes the work of the children and teenagers who participated in this huge and first contest of its genre done in Venezuela. In some articles, the local press emphasized this contest and the children of the school were later invited by a children TV program. Besides, they appeared in the cover of a local magazine due to the school arrival.

Due to the peremptory success of this activity and the availability of at least two asteroids donated by the professor Orlando Naranjo for this activity. We are now working on the 2008 contest, taking into consideration all we learned from this rewarding experience. This triumph resulted from the collaboration of a great group of people and institutions, but especially from the enthusiastic participation of the students from Lara. This contest is addressed for and to them.