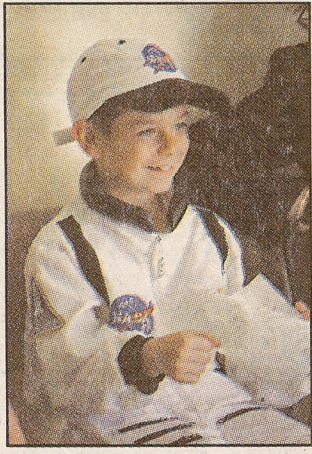


"If it's not fun and interactive, kids are not going to want to do it."

— Wanda Christiansen, executive director of the Lyceum of Monterey County

## Astronaut describes life in space

Albert Matei, 6, of Carmel, came prepared with a list of questions for real-life astronaut James Newman in Monterey on Wednesday.



VERN FISHER/The Herald

### GRADE SCHOOLERS A RAPT AUDIENCE

By JANE PALMER  
Herald Staff Writer

The plastic-wrapped green goo was passed from hand to hand with something akin to reverence. Never had creamed spinach received so much attention from a group of grade schoolers.

But this wasn't ordinary spinach. This was spinach that astronauts eat. And these children wanted to learn what it took to be an astronaut.

"I've wanted to be an astronaut since I was 7," said Jamie Reyes, 11, a student at King Middle School in Seaside.

She and the other students, some as young as 6, were at the Lyceum of Monterey County on Wednesday to meet astronaut James Newman.

For a full 90 minutes, the children were wide-eyed and open-mouthed as Newman, a former NASA astronaut, described what life is like in space: how astronauts eat, sleep, work and wash.

Now a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, Newman is a veteran of four space flights, logging more than 43 days in space.

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VERN FISHER/The Herald

Astronaut James Newman speaks to kids in Monterey on Wednesday. He has logged more than 43 days in space.

### Astronaut

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On his 2002 trip on the space shuttle Columbia, he went on five spacewalks in five days.

Newman didn't just lecture; he passed around packets of dehydrated food and engaged the children in animated discussion. He showed videos of galaxies passing through one another and photos of his fellow astronauts floating through the spacecraft corridors.

And the children gave as good as they got. Six-year-old Albert Matei, fully outfitted in a NASA flight suit, came with a long list of questions he had researched on the Internet.

"How are rockets created?" asked Albert. It was a question that, with the use of photos and models, Newman was only too prepared to answer.

One child asked what Newman's favorite food was in space.

"When you have been walking in space for six

hours and you've had nothing but water for 10 hours, there is nothing better than a beef steak tortilla," Newman said. When he held up the paper-thin cellophane-wrapped beef steak, however, the children looked unconvinced.

Newman demonstrated how to reconstitute and drink freeze-dried orange juice in space. But he cautioned the kids that making one false move in the zero-gravity zone would mean the juice was lost to the universe.

"If it's not fun and

interactive, kids are not going to want to do it," said Wanda Christiansen, executive director of the Lyceum. "This will encourage them to study and do well at school."

But these children needed no convincing. Jamie knows she will have to study math and science if she wants to be an astronaut, and Albert learned the name of all the planets by the time he was 4.

For them, the only challenge may be eating the green goo.

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