

# PORTSMOUTH PARTNERSHIP

Promoting economic growth, leadership and education within the City of Portsmouth

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[www.portsmouthpartnership.org](http://www.portsmouthpartnership.org)

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## STARBASE VICTORY *LAUNCHING IMAGINATIONS*

Sixth graders at Portsmouth's Victory Elementary School know that Sir Isaac Newton's Three Laws of Motion express the relationship between force, mass and acceleration. But they also know that, thanks to the efforts of their teachers, mentors, School Superintendent and community, the science and technical curriculum at STARBASE Victory has awakened them to another kind of force: that of their own imaginations.



AEROBASE, Day 5: LAUNCH DAY!

STARBASE Victory ([www.starbasevictory.org](http://www.starbasevictory.org)) currently includes ENVIROBASE Aquarius, in which all of Portsmouth's

ENVIROBASE researcher

Fifth graders observe and measure the impacts of both human and natural phenomena on their local environment, examine weather patterns, and compare their local environments with those of other locations. Sixth graders from across the city explore **AEROBASE Atlantis**, which presents a sweeping view of the laws of physics and flight while teaching goal-setting and teamwork. And, beginning this fall, the city's fourth graders will discover the principles of spatial measurement, cartography and navigation through **SPACEBASE Atlas**. These classes serve all of Portsmouth's fourth, fifth and sixth graders, who meet once a week for five weeks, and are taught by outstanding, dedicated professionals with a minimum of a Master's degree in their respective fields of study. Coursework includes extensive use of computers, and requires that students maintain written journals of their work.

The idea of reaching kids' imaginations through science and rocketry was the driving force behind the U.S. Navy's **STARBASE Atlantis** program, which came to Norfolk in 1996. The program seeks to increase students' proficiency in math and science while providing a positive alternative to today's burgeoning array of distractions, including drug abuse. On Day One all students are issued uniforms – colored T-shirts – and assume call names, just like real Navy pilots; on Day Five, each kid launches his or her very own rocket. What happens in between is like little else encountered in a "regular" day of "regular" classes.

**STARBASE Atlantis** came to Portsmouth with retired Admiral Wm. Hayden in 2002. Housed in a Navy facility near the former Cradock High School, the original program served only fifth graders; however, the program's purpose, design and success soon drew the attention of an important and growing group of supporters who recognized its potential to serve both younger and older students. The seeds of Starbase Victory were sown.

**STARBASE Victory** represents the confluence of several related initiatives, and the triumph of Portsmouth's courage, creativity and dedication in the face of discouraging odds. For years Portsmouth's school enrollment had dropped, and its teacher turnover had accelerated. Test scores and school accreditation were severely challenged, as was the City's tax base. Nevertheless, the elements of positive change were there for those bold enough to embrace them: the New Port community promised to bring 1400 homeowners to the neighborhood, necessitating the expansion of the former Highland-Biltmore Elementary School; the City committed \$5M toward the school's expansion while the school system had an additional \$2.5M; the City's budget had, for several years, supported an increase in teacher pay, leading to increased teacher retention and, in some cases, teachers' returning to the school system. Last, but not least: Dr. David Stuckwisch, Superintendent of Schools, was convinced that good jobs would await those Portsmouth students who had strong mathematics and science skills. Accordingly, he had the courage and vision to look beyond convention as he sought to produce an expanded science program with the potential to shoot beyond previous expectations and previous results – and previous attempts to raise SOL scores. To him, the building of a new school provided the opportunity to build a new curriculum.

He tapped **Laura Nelson**, Director of Science Education, to design from scratch a curriculum that would take Portsmouth's science program – and its kids – to the next level. Could such a program be innovative, yet realistic? Could she find instructors who would be comfortable in an untested environment? Would she find community support? Most importantly, would the program benefit the kids?

The product of Laura Nelson's effort is Portsmouth's **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Pathways** program. It extends from grade four through grade twelve; covers a range of material including spatial skills, biotechnology, modeling and simulation, robotics, research and design and technical writing; includes Advanced Placement and college classes; utilizes hands-on projects, technology, computers and writing at every level; enlists mentors from the likes of NNSY, NOAA, the Schooner Virginia, VPA, the Elizabeth River Project and others; has drawn support from the Beazley Foundation, the Portsmouth Community Foundation, the Portsmouth Partnership Foundation, the Portsmouth General Hospital Foundation, Wright Engineering, Earl Industries and more; and has produced associations with, among others, TCC, ODU, Hampton University, Nauticus, JMU and EVMS.

**Kids look forward** to coming to school, teachers are eager to join the program, and ODU's Education Department is eager to join Portsmouth's schools in creating a first-of-its-kind summer enrichment program. And **test scores**? In 2004, only 43% of African-American 8<sup>th</sup> graders passed the Reading and Language Arts SOL; in 2007, African-American 8<sup>th</sup> graders' passing rate was 66% - **up over 53%**. Similarly, History / Social Studies passing rates for African-American 8<sup>th</sup> graders were **up 80%**. Is there a direct relationship between STARBASE Victory's innovative approach to learning and these dramatically improved test scores? Maybe. But it seems evident that there is merit in focusing more on subject matter than on minimum test scores, and that an engaged child is a growing, productive, learning child.

**Albert Einstein** said that "logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere." Seems he was right.



AEROBASE classroom



ENVIROBASE students and guests



ENVIROBASE students at work

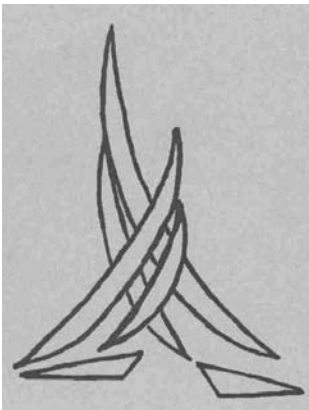


AEROBASE: launch and retrieval of Hampton Roads, a 501 c 3. Please visit [www.starbasevictory.org](http://www.starbasevictory.org) to see how you can help.

STARBASE Victory is funded through STARBASE-ATLANTIS

## LEFCOE *SAIL* AWARDS PRESENTED

### *FIFTH ANNUAL EVENT HELD AT BIDE-A-WEE*



THE LEFCOE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S fifth annual **SAIL** Awards were presented on April 3, 2008, at Bide-A-Wee Golf Course. This year's recipients included John Roshell Jenkins, Band and Orchestra Director at Wilson High School, Carol E. Rowe, Portsmouth Schools' Grant Development Supervisor, and Jessica Maria Coker, who teaches first grade at Douglass Park Elementary School.

THE **Support and Assistance in Instructional Leadership** Award recognizes and rewards those professionals within the school system who work beyond the norm to the benefit of our schools and our school children. In addition to a beautiful award plaque, each award winner receives a \$1,000 check from the Lefcoe Alumni Association.

In 2007 a \$1,000 scholarship was added to the program. This year's scholarship recipient was Adrian J. Bravo, a senior at Churchland High School. Adrian received early acceptance to ODU, and plans to work toward an MD in psychiatry.



**GPDC 10 years 1,000 jobs \$8,000,000 tax revenue**

