

## SPACE PROGRAM LIFTS OFF



Alex von Kleydorff / Hearst Connecticut Media

Dillan Robles and Rayan Vahora get their spacesuits on with others on the first day of the Blast-Off Camp on Monday at the Norwalk Public Library.

### Blast-Off Camp session begins at the Norwalk Public Library

**By Kevin Schultz**

NORWALK — Eric Rivera is fascinated with outer space. He loves the brightness of the sun and the planets that “go around and around.” But, he admittedly would never want to actually travel there.

“The moon is dark and looks fun to jump on,” Eric said, but “space is far too

spacey.” He would rather become a police officer than a planet-exploring astronaut.

Luckily for the 7-year-old rising third-grader, Eric has the opportunity this week to explore the vast cosmos of space — with spacesuit and all — without ever leaving the confines of the Norwalk Public Library. He is one of 30 youngsters in grades one

### SUMMER *smarts*

What kids are doing to stay busy this season

through five, participating in this year’s Blast-Off Camp!, a summer program held at the Norwalk Public Library main branch aimed at teaching

campers how to use the array of resources available from the library through the lens of space exploration.

“Part of it is learning about space,” said Marcia Kibbe, a camp co-director, “but also teaching them how to do research and using the different systems available in the library.”

*See Space on A6*



Marlinn Alphonse gets to try on his spacesuit after he created his own design with others on the first day of the 'Blast-Off Camp!' on Monday at the Norwalk Public Library.

Photo: Alex Von Kleydorff / Hearst Connecticut Media



Outreach Librarian Marcia Kibbe trims the spacesuit down to size for Het Kathriya on the first day of the 'Blast-Off Camp!' on Monday at the Norwalk Public Library.





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 Gabriella Frabrizio colors in her design on her spacesuit on the first day of the Blast-Off Camp! on Monday at the Norwalk Public Library.

## SPACE

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The camp started Monday morning and runs through Thursday, 10 a.m. to noon each day.

Around 11 a.m. Monday, 30 kids sat spread out in a room on the second floor of the library, decorating with colored markers faux space suits to be worn later in the week. An image of the Earth as seen from space was projected on a nearby wall.

Rivera colored blue circles near the hand openings of his space suit — really a plain white disposable coverall — in sections he called “blasters,” used to move him from place to place in zero gravity.

Nearby, siblings Marlinn, 8, and Cyndell Alphonse, 6, worked on their spacesuits.

Marlinn while coloring a pattern up the arm of his spacesuit, said he was excited to learn about the planets, specifically his favorite: Venus.

Cyndell, whose favorite planet is Mars, said she was excited to learn about how astronauts sleep in the rockets they take to space and what they eat and drink along the way.

Throughout the week, the campers would have the opportunity to do just that.

At the beginning of the week, campers would explore what it takes to be an astronaut. They'd then design rockets and learn what it takes to get to space. They'd then select planets and research each. At the end of the week, they were slated to put on their spacesuits for an exploration that would pull everything they've learned together.



Kids celebrate their new spacesuits.

Throughout the learning, Kibbe said there would also be a lot of fun. There will be an outer space obstacle course, a planet model making project and shoebox moon-walking.

This is the third year for the camp, which carried the theme of super heroes the first year and the Olympics last year. The camp runs twice per year: the first week after school lets out for the summer and the last week of summer. This timing is strategic, Kibbe said, as it bridges the gap before the beginning and end of other, longer-running summer programs in Norwalk.

Keeping kids engaged during the summer months is important as it helps prevent the dreaded summer slide, a phenomenon based on research that shows students, especially from low-income families, tend to lose gains they made during the previous school year while left unengaged during the

summer break.

Norwalk ACTS, along with a group of Norwalk's educational leaders — known as TEAM Summer — launched a one-stop shop for all of the city's summer learning programs earlier this year, dubbed the Summer Resource Portal. They created the database in hopes more of Norwalk's students can attend a summer learning program to help combat the summer slide. The portal can be found by going to [www.norwalkacts.org/teamsummer/](http://www.norwalkacts.org/teamsummer/) and clicking on the green link.

Blast-Off! camp is free to attend. All campers must be registered. This week's session has already reached capacity. The next session will take place Aug. 21-24, 10 a.m. to noon. Those interested can register their child by calling 203-899-2780, ext. 15131.

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