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A lesson in science of after-school fun

Brattle Farms project among 10 across state

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At the Brattle Farms housing development in Brockton, seven youngsters spent 15 weeks in the fall and winter cre-

ating a Web site on volcanoes, proving to themselves and to the community what they are capable of accomplishing.

The project was part of Sciencequest, a weekly after-school

program sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

The Brattle Farms program is one of 10 Sciencequest efforts across Massachusetts involving about 100 children. The program is set to launch nationwide in June.

At Brattle Farms, another ses-

sion of Sciencequest began this month. Now that the frog eggs have hatched, students are monitoring the growth of the tadpoles into frogs.

Hartley Verdier, 10, was one of the youngsters who helped build the volcano Web site. He said he always looked forward to Wednesday, when the program would meet.

"We would talk about volcanoes, and it was fun, because everything else is hard for me like animals, history, geography and math, but I love social studies and science," said the Raymond School fourth-grader.

Verdier's sister, Roldy, 11, also participated in the after-school program.

"I learned a lot of stuff that I didn't know before," said Roldy, a sixth-grad-

er at the school. Brandon Wright, 9, who is in the fourth grade at the Brookfield School, said he had fun putting the site together.

"We went looking for volcano pictures online, and would cut and paste them," he said.

Jennifer Dorsen, project manager for Sciencequest, said the project's site on the Internet, www.edc.org/sciencequest, "allows the children to show the community and the rest of the world what they learned."

Since the site's launch at the end of February, the group has received inquiries from across the nation.

The youngsters who took part in the program at the government-subsidized development ranged in age from 10 to 14. They picked the topic of volcanoes themselves and then brainstormed about what questions they would like to see answered. Questions and answers wound up on the Web site, which was created through a computer host server maintained by Thinkquest, which is affiliated with Sciencequest.

Jeanne Cratty, who is the activities director at Brattle Farms and also the coach for the Sciencequest team, said the goal of the project was getting different groups of youngsters to interact. Cratty said the program seeks to involve minorities, disabled chil-

dren, girls and English-as-a-second-language students.

Dorsen said the program focused on the production of an informative Web site because children learn best when teaching other people what they learn.

The group began the project in October and each participant received a certificate for their work.

"A lot of people would have quit," Dorsen said, "but this team stuck it out."