

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Talk to the stars

Local educator named to committee that connects the International Space Station with students

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If you've ever looked up in the night sky when there are no clouds or moon about, you might have just seen a tiny white dot moving from horizon to horizon. That would be the International Space Station, 249 miles above the Earth.

Down below in Santa Barbara, on the Mesa to be exact, a group of amateur radio enthusiasts might just be talking to the station, and very soon students might be sharing the communication.

That's because the Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club announced last week that one of its board members, Levi C. Maaia, has been named to the Amateur Radio on the International Space Station U.S. Education Committee.

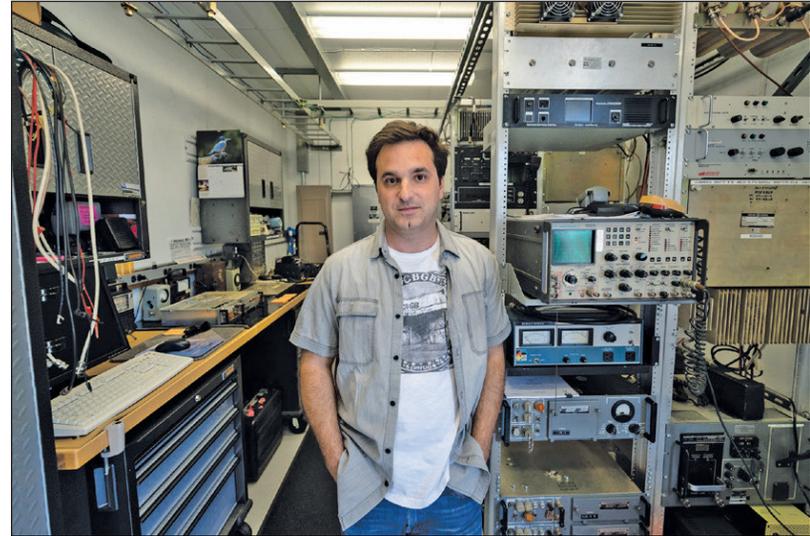
ARISS connects students to the space station through a partnership between NASA, the American Radio Relay League, the Radio Amateur Satellite Corp. and other amateur-radio organizations and space agencies in Russia, Canada, Japan and Europe.

"When people hear 'amateur radio' they think of old guys sending Morse code in a basement," said Mr. Maaia, "but a lot of it today is looking at digital communications and data links."

The club has even created its own private Internet using a mesh network of radio waves that could continue if the regular Internet goes down. These folks are at the forefront of a lot of technology but work out of the pure love of it.

Mr. Maaia got into telecommunications and almost immediately started wondering how to educate people through it, not just as a passive experience of entertainment. Starting his research at UCSB in 2008, he is finally wrapping up his dissertation on technology-focused STEM (for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education, and has taught for many years at Anacapa School developing a STEM initiative there. That's when he first worked with students to contact the International Space Station.

First they started building high-altitude balloons and sending them into space, then figuring out how to



KENNETH SONG / NEWS-PRESS

Levi Maaia of the Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club has been named to the Amateur Radio on the International Space Station U.S. Education Committee.

connect with the data the balloons collected through radio waves.

That led to Mr. Maaia hearing about ARISS and realizing it was a way for all the students to get involved and talk to the space station. And in 2013 they did.

"I mean, how often do you get to talk to someone who is presently in space?" he said, adding that the event "galvanized" the school.

Mr. Maaia kept in touch with ARISS and recently the program has received new funding. ARISS was actively seeking out educators to be on this pilot committee, and Mr. Maaia is one of them. He is look-

ing forward to adding to the already 1,100 contacts between the space station and students that has happened worldwide through ARISS.

"And now if any local school wants to (learn to talk to the space station), they are eligible," he said.

Good news for educators as well: the committee is looking for more educators. Those interested can write to k1sto@arrl.org. Schools and other educational organizations that want to apply to host a scheduled contact with the International Space Station can visit www.ariss.org.

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