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SCHOOLS



Brett Guthrie, 13, leads students in prayer at the end of a meeting of the creation science club at Andrew Jackson Middle School.

'Darwin is Dead'

Middle school students start creation science club

By Eric Eyre
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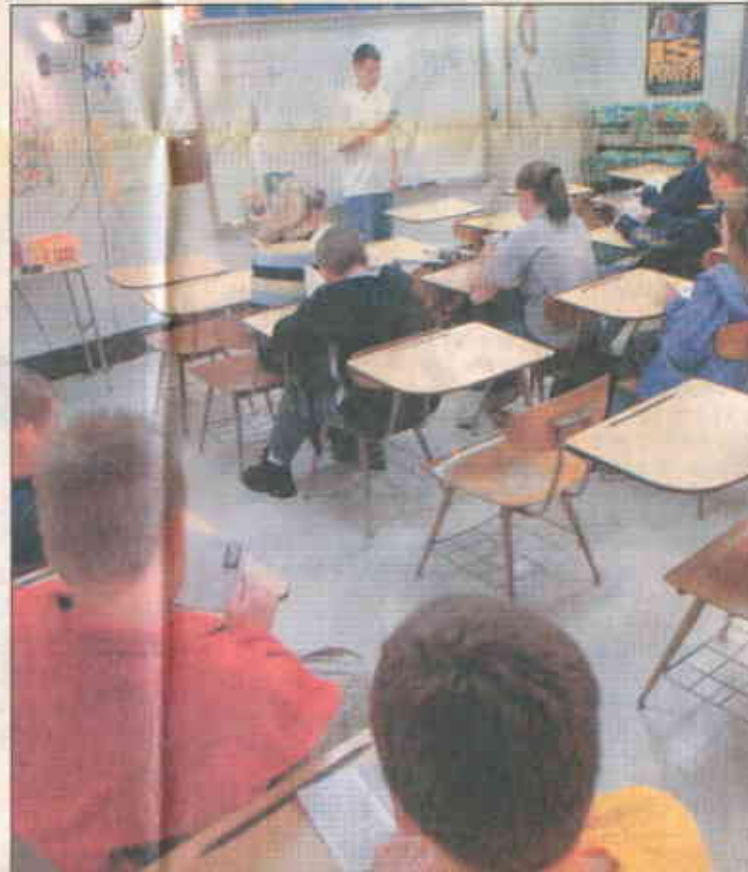
ANDREW JACKSON Middle School teacher Karl Priest spotted a student wearing an anti-evolution T-shirt at school last fall and invited the boy to help launch a creation science club.

On the front, Joshua Gingerich's T-shirt said, "Darwin is dead, and he ain't coming back." On the back, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth ... By Him, were all things created both seen and unseen."

Gingerich, 13, not only joined the club, he became a leader.

About a dozen Andrew Jackson students meet every Thursday morning before school in a classroom to rip evolution theory and tout creation science.

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supporting teachers who challenged evolution theory in classrooms. A year later, he nearly persuaded board members and science teachers to place 48 copies of a controversial anti-evolution textbook in the county's schools.

Priest stays on the sidelines during the club's meetings at school, students said. But he'll correct them if they get something wrong, they said.

"I go to help other kids know right from wrong, that God created the Earth. It's not man-made," said Stephanie Cobb, a 15-year-old eighth-grader at Andrew Jackson.

Cobb's mother, Natalie, said she grilled Priest about Scripture and the creation club before her daughter joined. Priest passed.

"It's a wonderful club," Natalie Cobb said. "Every school should have them. We have a free country. We have freedom of speech.

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About a dozen Andrew Jackson students meet every Thursday morning before school in a classroom to rip evolution theory and tout creation science.

"I'm proud he's willing to make that step out to be a witness to his friends, to not be ashamed of being a Christian," said Joshua's mother, Dreama. "I'm proud he's willing to participate in a group like that."

The students present reports and watch videos during their 30-minute meetings, which started in September.

Gingerich presented a report called "Dinosaurs and the Bible." Priest provided him with a booklet on the topic. There's a brief reference to dinosaurs in Job, Gingerich said.

"It's just fun to teach people about Creation," he said. "We tell them how



Michael Adams makes a presentation to members of the club.

the Earth was created and that evolution was not actually true."

Priest, a member of an adult creation science club in Kanawha County, has repeatedly sparred with Kanawha County school officials over the way evolution is taught in schools.

Three years ago, he demanded that school board members pass a resolution

supporting teachers who challenged evolution theory in classrooms. A year later, he nearly persuaded board members and science teachers to place 48 copies of a controversial anti-evolution textbook in the county's schools.

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"It's a wonderful club," Natalie Cobb said. "Every school should have them. We have a free country. We have freedom of speech.

"We should be able to speak our minds. The board of education tries to stop things like that."

Andrew Jackson Principal Catherine Bennett, a former science teacher who strongly believes in evolution theory,

said she called school system Attorney Jim Withrow about the club.

Withrow told her the creation club could exist, provided students didn't meet on school time. The creation club announces its meetings over the school system's intercom — as other clubs do.

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CLUB

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Bennett and Priest have a "friendly disagreement" over evolution. Priest frequently pops anti-evolution materials into her mailbox at school. "I know he can't change me, and I can't change him," Bennett said.

Priest said the students in the creation club aren't science nerds. He called them "inquisitive." He said they spend more time criticizing evolution than promoting creationism.

"My goal is for students and the public to realize there's nothing to fear from good science,

even if it's critical of evolution," said Priest, who also sponsors the student chess club at school.

The club members said they'd like to start a creation science club at Nitro High next year.

"Once kids start to hear about this, they'll join," said Brett Guthrie, an eighth-grader, who presented a report to students saying that the Earth is 6,000 to 10,000 years old, not billions of years old, as most scientists believe. "It's not just about evolution. It's about biblical stuff, too. Basically, it's like Fellowship of Christian Athletes: church for 20 minutes, with some science mixed in."

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