

# Young scientists work toward their dreams of flying in space

By **Greg Hitchcock**  
*Contributor*

Robin Petgrave started as an entrepreneur early in his aviation career by giving back to his community of South Los Angeles.

"I'd get requests to fly helicopters to schools and talk to the kids about flying," he said.

Today, Petgrave is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit Tomorrow's Aeronautical Museum, an interactive aviation museum in Compton dedicated to portraying diversity in the history of flight and getting inner-city youth interested in aviation careers.

Recently, TAM expanded to include an educational component offering elementary, middle and high school students the opportunity to work one-on-one with qualified tutors, mentors and aviation staff five days a week.

According to Petgrave, the museum is a living classroom and he tries to impart his enthusiasm for flight to the students.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOMORROW'S AERONAUTICAL MUSEUM

Students at Tomorrow's Aeronautical Museum are training to become future scientists and help their dreams take flight.

"I've been flying for 24 years. I still get excited when I'm up there, but knowing what I have to do each time," Petgrave said. "It's like getting a driver's license and driving like a NASCAR driver."

TAM has had six students achieve 12 aviation records, including one who was one of the top influential people in 2009 and another who set a record for becoming the youngest pilot to fly for a major airline at 19.

"Today, we are training kids to be astronauts," Petgrave said. "Aviation and aerospace is not such a long leap of the imagination."

He said when the Wright Brothers invented the airplane, it was difficult to get the public interested in flying in them.

"So, the early pilots would have barnstorming events where they would do all kinds of flying stunts," said Petgrave. "People started to become comfort-

able with flying and a whole airline industry was eventually built. It all started with barnstormers at fields and fairs."

TAM has already selected five candidates for its space program, built their training team, and put together a curriculum around training youth to be the next John Glenn or Buzz Aldrin.

"We want to say to our inner-city youth and others that we have a space camp right here for inner city