



RNASA

ROTARY NATIONAL AWARD
FOR SPACE ACHIEVEMENT

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RNASA Foundation honors Dr. Christopher Scolese, Gina Sunseri, Gerald Griffin and Stellar Winners



HOUSTON, Texas (May 1, 2024). The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation presented the National Space Trophy (NST) to **Dr. Christopher Scolese**, Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, at the annual RNASA black-tie Space Awards Gala on April 26, 2024, at the Houston Hyatt Regency. In addition, the Space Communicator Award was presented to ABC News Producer **Gina Sunseri**, and the Corona Award, which has only been awarded four times in the foundations 37-year history, was presented to **Gerald Griffin**, former NASA Apollo Flight Director and former Johnson Space Center Director.

RNASA Foundation Chairman **Rodolfo González** welcomed guests to the gala, saying, “the RNASA Foundation recognizes achievements in space across the entire nation and across all sectors, and we are incredibly honored to have so many visitors here from around the country.”

The **Clear Brook High School JROTC Color Guard** presented the colors, followed by **Danny Myers**, who sang the National Anthem. **Reverend David Bridges**, Executive Director of the Clear Creek Family Promise, provided the invocation.

After dinner, the program kicked off with a year-in-review film by **Space City Films**. **Kristin Fisher**, CNN Space and Defense Correspondent, served as the emcee. In her opening remarks, Kristin said, “make no mistake, the reason that I have the job that I have today is because of the hard work that all of you have done in the past 10 years to really propel the space industry to new heights...something that I find so remarkable and so inspiring in 2024.”

Stellar Awards were presented to 29 individuals and 9 teams. The Stellar Award winners were announced by NASA Astronauts “**Woody**” **Hoburg** and **Jasmin Moghbeli**, who then presented them with engraved marble trophies. The Stellar Awards were presented in Early Career, Mid-Career, Late Career, and Team categories.

Freelancer writer **Mark Carreau** presented the Space Communicator Award to Gina Sunseri. He remarked, “I consider the best reporters to be astronauts that explore the Earth, and I believe Gina is every bit of that. She’s dedicated to understanding the technical and scientific subject matter as well as the personal challenges that are part of the space profession.”

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Sunseri said of her award, “part of what I wanted to talk about tonight are the human stories that really catch people’s attention...Pam Melroy gave me very bad news; she said chocolate tastes bad in space. I think that’s fascinating, and I think our viewers really, really enjoy that kind of story.”

Johnson Space Center Director **Vanessa Wyche** presented the coveted Corona Award to Gerald Griffin. She reflected on Griffin’s career, saying, “Gerry’s immense dedication and contribution to the space program shaped our agency’s foundation and inspired generations to push the boundaries of what’s possible...serving as an exemplary mentor and advocate for the future of space exploration.”



Griffin said of his award, “when NASA was formed, it set off a bell with me that I wanted to get into that business...it immediately resonated in my mind. If there is a legacy from Apollo....it was the fact that we had done it. When we started, we didn’t know we could do it, we thought we could, but we didn’t know for sure. So when we started having this round of success, we finally got it in our mind we are going to do this. And if anything we’ve left for Artemis is that you can take this (doubt) out of the equation – it can be done.”

Mike Coats, former Johnson Space Center Director, presented the prestigious National Space Trophy to Dr. Christopher Scolese. While introducing Scolese, Mike commented “As the JSC Director, I had the good fortune to work with Chris for several years, and I have yet to see him raise his voice or show much frustration. Even when he was the Acting NASA Administrator he always kept his poise. Nowadays, a lot of people are asking ‘where are the adults in the room?’...it gives me great pleasure to introduce one of those adults in the room.”



During his acceptance speech, **Scolese** remarked, “In the past, I have been asked how I arrived at the many positions held over the years. I said that there was a book that was edited by the first recipient of the National Space Trophy – Max Faget. It was “Manned Spacecraft: Engineering Design and Operation”...it is a great book that explains the intricacies of design, orbital mechanics, how to deal with challenges, and more. While the technology it describes is dated, the principles are everlasting. I have worked with and continue to work with incredible people – all amazing, all willing to push the envelope, and all willing to help each other. I think what we really do is give people hope for the future. We show how technology can be used to improve

the world, to expand the horizon of society, and to motivate people, especially young people, like Max Faget did, to do difficult things and strive for the stars.”



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Eileen Collins, astronaut and recipient of the RNASA 2006 National Space Trophy, presented an OMEGA Speedmaster watch to Scolese. Collins paid tribute to General Tom Stafford who presented the OMEGA Watch to the RNASA NST recipients for 22 years prior to his passing in 2024. Collins reflected on Stafford's legacy saying, "General Stafford was an incredible human being - he was an explorer, he was a hero, he was a diplomat, he was a leader with integrity." She went on to point out facts about the Speedmaster watch, "It holds two records - one is the distance record from Earth on Apollo 13 when it went as far as 249,000 miles from Earth, and the other is a speed record - 24,791mph on Apollo 10 which was commanded by General Stafford."

A portrait of Scolese was on display at the gala and used as the cover of the souvenir program. The portrait will become part of the National Space Trophy display at Space Center Houston for one year.

RNASA Chairman Rodolfo González concluded the evening by thanking the Foundation's corporate sponsors whose support and achievements made the event possible: Aegis Aerospace, Inc., Aerojet Rocketdyne, L3Harris, The Aerospace Corporation, All Points Logistics, ARES Corporation, ASRC Federal Axiom Space, Barrios Technology, Bastion Technologies, Inc., Blue Origin, The Boeing Company, Booz Allen Hamilton, CACI International, Collins Aerospace, Deloitte, Draper, Jacobs, JES Tech, KBR, Leidos, Lockheed Martin, Logical Innovations, Inc., MORI Associates, Inc., MRI Technologies, Northrop Grumman Oceanering International, OMEGA, Paragon Space Development, Peraton, SAIC, SpaceX, TTTech North America, Inc., United Launch Alliance, V2X, Vericon Technical Services.

Visit <http://www.rnasa.org/photos.html> for images from the event.

The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation's black-tie Gala on April 26, 2024, was recorded live, in its entirety, by Space City Films and is accessible on the website's agenda page, www.rnasa.org/agenda.html.