



**RNASA**

ROTARY NATIONAL AWARD  
FOR SPACE ACHIEVEMENT

## For Immediate Release

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## Dr. Peggy Whitson, Vice President of Human Spaceflight at Axiom Space, to receive the 2026 National Space Trophy



**Houston, Texas (January 15, 2026).** The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation has selected Dr. Peggy Whitson, Vice President of Human Spaceflight at Axiom Space, to receive the 2026 National Space Trophy. The banquet honoring Whitson will be held on April 24, 2026, at the Downtown Hyatt Regency in Houston, Texas.

Rodolfo González, president of the RNASA Foundation, said, "The RNASA Foundation is thrilled to host Dr. Whitson as the guest of honor at the 2026 Space Awards Gala. The annual gala is organized to recognize outstanding achievements in our field, and we look forward to celebrating Dr. Whitson's contributions to space discovery, exploration, and advancement."

Whitson was nominated for the award by Johnson Space Center Director Vanessa Wyche. Wyche commented on Whitson's achievements, saying, "Dr. Peggy Whitson's story is one of vision, perseverance, and unparalleled achievement. Her 695 days in space, her record-setting spacewalks, and her leadership at NASA stand as a legacy of excellence. Her continuing impact in commercial spaceflight, helping to usher in a new era of international participation and private exploration, ensures that her influence will resonate for generations to come."

"I am deeply grateful to receive the National Space Trophy and to Vanessa for this nomination," said Whitson. "This recognition reflects the dedication of countless pioneers who have advanced human space exploration. I am honored to be chosen as this year's awardee in their spirit – always reaching further and inspiring the next generation to dream boldly about our future in space."

With a background in biochemistry from Rice University, Whitson's remarkable career began in 1989 as a National Research Council Research Associate at NASA's Johnson Space Center. Before she was selected as an Astronaut, Whitson played a leading role in conducting the biomedical research critical to the future of human space exploration, including the impact of long-duration spaceflight on the human body.

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Whitson was selected as an Astronaut candidate in 1996. After completing two years of training, Whitson's first flight came in June 2002 aboard STS-111 on Expedition 5. During her 184-day stay aboard the International Space Station, she was named the first NASA Science Officer and conducted dozens of investigations in microgravity sciences.

Beginning in 2003, Whitson served in numerous roles supporting the Astronaut Office, including Deputy Chief, NEEMO mission Commander, and Chief of the Station Operations Branch. In 2009, she was selected as the first female and first non-military Chief of the Astronaut Office, where she directed mission preparation and on-orbit support of ISS crews.

Whitson's second flight launched in October 2007 aboard the Soyuz TMA-11 on Expedition 16. As the first female Commander of the space station, she conducted life sciences and microgravity research that continues to shape the future of space exploration.

Whitson's final NASA flight came in November 2016 aboard Expedition 50/51/52, when she broke the record for cumulative time spent in space by an American astronaut – 675 days, surpassing the previous record of 534 days.

Whitson transitioned to the private sector in 2021 when she joined Axiom Space as the Vice President of Human Spaceflight. Her experience and leadership have offered a unique bridge between NASA and the emerging commercial space market. Since joining Axiom Space, she has commanded two commercial missions to the station, first aboard the Falcon 9 rocket on Axiom Mission 2 in 2023 and, again, in 2025 aboard the first flight of Crew Dragon Grace on Axiom Mission 4.

Whitson is the recipient of numerous honors, including the NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, NASA Space Flight Medal, NASA Exceptional Service Medal, Women in Space Science Award. She was recognized in the 2018 *Time Magazine* list of influential people, she was inducted into the International Air and Space Hall of Fame in 2018, and she was recognized as one of the BBC's 100 Women of 2017. Whitson holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and chemistry from Iowa Wesleyan College and a Doctorate in Biochemistry from Rice University.

The RNASA Foundation invites members of the public and the aerospace community to attend the black-tie event on April 24, 2026, at the Houston Hyatt Regency, where Whitson will be presented with the National Space Trophy during the 38<sup>th</sup> annual RNASA Space Awards gala. Please visit [rnasa.org](https://www.rnasa.org) to reserve your table, purchase tickets, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities. If you would like to reserve a room for the evening, please contact the Hyatt at 713-654-1234 and inquire about the RNASA group rate.