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Women In Defense Space Announces 2024 Education Innovator Awards and Awards \$17K in STEM Scholarships to Space Coast Students

Melbourne, FL (June 25, 2024) – The Women in Defense Space Coast Chapter (WIDSC) recently announced the winners of its 2024 STEM Education Innovator Awards and the recipients of its 2024 STEM scholarships on Thursday, June 20, at the Courtyard by Marriott Cocoa Beach. These accolades underscore WID's commitment to foster STEM educational opportunities and careers and to promote the role of women in national defense and security.

The Education Innovator Award recipients included:

- Dr. Theresa E. Watson, Deputy Chief Scientist of the Air Force Technical Applications Center (AFTAC) at Patrick Space Force Base, as the STEM Leadership Star of the Year for serving as champion for the Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) conference - a two-day event where local students take part in STEM activities and learn about STEM opportunities.
- Chris Larsen, co-founder of Larsen Motorsports, as the STEM Mentor of the Year for turning a passion for high-speed racing into a unique and powerful educational platform while mentoring over 250 students during the past 20 years.
- Colleen Anderson, Surfside Elementary, as the STEM Elementary Educator of the Year for her dynamic teaching methods and her role in coordinating science fairs that connect students with STEM professionals.
- Rebecca Allen, Palm Bay Magnet High School, as the STEM High School Educator of the Year for her dedication to expanding student access to industry expertise and resources.

In addition to recognizing these distinguished educators and leaders, WIDSC awarded \$17K in scholarships ranging from \$1250 to \$500 for exemplary students pursuing STEM disciplines. The scholarship winners included:

- **Abigail Shephard**, Florida Atlantic University, BS/MD Cellular Neuroscience/Mathematics
- **Aki Densmore**, Florida Tech, Chemical Engineering, Minor in Aerospace
- **Alexa Mason**, Florida Tech, Physics
- **Ann Hough**, University of Florida, Pharmacy
- **Cassandra Stanish**, Florida Tech, Mechanical Engineering, Minor in Sustainability



- **Christina Souvannala**, University of Illinois, Master of Library/Information Science
- **Deztynee Bryan**, Florida Tech, Meteorology
- **Elizabeth Eskildsen**, Eastern Florida State College, Business Sustainability, Minor - Environmental Science
- **Ella Benson**, Virginia Tech, Architecture
- **Emily Prins**, University of Florida, Biochemistry
- **Erin Kohler**, University of Florida, Microbiology and Cell Science
- **Gianna Fernandez**, University of Florida, Computer Engineering
- **Grace Peters**, University of Florida, Mechanical Engineering
- **Jayda Holman**, University of Miami, Environmental Engineering
- **Jody Junek**, University of Florida, Biomedical Engineering
- **Katherine Wade**, Florida Tech, Ocean Engineering
- **Kathryn Burgess**, Florida State University, Nursing, Minor in Business
- **Lillian Paquette**, University of Florida, Mechanical/Aerospace Engineering
- **Madeline Biggs**, Florida State University, Mechanical Engineering, Minor in Computer Science
- **Mallory Jeancake**, Samford University, Nursing
- **Marisa Ricks**, University of Florida, Preprofessional Biology, Minor Org. Leadership
- **Ryleigh Renedina**, University of Florida, Biomedical Engineering. Minor in Animal Science

WIDSC also announced the recipient of the 2024 joint WIDSC - AFTAC WiSE scholarship.

- **Melissa McGuire**, Rollins College, Executive MBA

Elizabeth Huy, President of the Space Coast Women in Defense, commented, "This year's awards and scholarships highlight the incredible talent and dedication within our community. Our goal is not only to recognize excellence but also to inspire the next generation of women to explore STEM fields and consider careers in national defense. "

Since its inception in 2013, WIDSC has awarded \$94,000 in scholarships to women in the community who have pursued studies to advance their careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

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[About Women In Defense Space Coast Chapter](#)

The Women In Defense Space Coast Chapter (WIDSC) was founded January 21, 2013 and is a 501c3 affiliate of the National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA). WIDSC provides networking and professional development opportunities to promote the role of women in national defense and security, to support military service members, and to encourage partnerships within the local contractor community, defense industry and military personnel. Learn more at <https://widsc.org/>.