

ORIGINS

STEM Origins Foundation

March 2026



Indigo Arellano: Student of the Month

Every month of the school year, we select a STEM student in recognition of those who most reflect our core values of Passion, Diligence & Aptitude for STEM, while also demonstrating Collaboration with others.

On February 24, 2026, the STEM Origins Foundation presented our monthly STEM Student of the Month award to Indigo Arellano of Tyndall Academy. Indigo received a medal, a certificate suitable for framing, and a gift certificate to Texas Roadhouse.

Because outstanding teachers produce outstanding students, we also recognized his robotics team coach, Mr. Frank Weiss, with a gift certificate from Texas Roadhouse along with a copy of Indy’s award to display in his classroom.

Below is the nomination written by Mr. Weiss:

“Indigo has been a vital member and leader of Fossil Tech Birds, one of Tyndall Academy's First Lego League Competition teams, competing against other teams in the Northwest Florida area. This requires Passion, Diligence, Aptitude, and Collaboration, as teams construct working robots, problem-solve, then program their robots to carry out solutions. Indigo persisted in solving various challenges creatively and by collaborating with his team mates and others. Indigo led his team to qualify for the Regional Championship in their first year of competition! This is far above the norm in his grade!”

After the presentation, we spoke with Indigo, his family, and Mr. Weiss, who explained

In this issue:

Meet a STEM Origins Volunteer

In Appreciation

Remote Control

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Opportunity

Hutchison Beach STEM Night

Fun(d)raising

Robotics Roundup

Better Batteries

About Us

how robotics has been transformative for Indigo, channeling his natural STEM aptitude into growing confidence and leadership. We also saw Indy’s LEGO robots in action, including a fully functional robotic “hand,” and were impressed by the interchangeable features and thoughtful designs.

Meet a STEM Origins Volunteer: Greg Mertz

Greg Mertz is a civil structural engineer who started his career designing steel buildings. Like many engineers early on, he spent his first years solving practical design problems. Unlike many, Greg found that each project left him with more questions about how structures behave, especially during earthquakes. Curiosity eventually led him to graduate school, where he developed a seismic analysis tool for concrete buildings and earned a Ph.D.

Over the 35 years since graduate school, Greg has specialized in the seismic qualification of high-hazard buildings and components, mostly within the U.S. Department of Energy nuclear complex. Greg has served as a staff engineer at both Savannah River Site and Los Alamos National Laboratory. Today he works as an independent consultant, which suits his habit of pursuing interesting technical problems.

A typical project might start with a site visit and project research, move into detailed computer analyses, and sometimes lead to the development of custom software. Add in technical report writing and collaboration

with peer review groups, and Greg has the kind of work that keeps both his engineering instincts and curiosity engaged.

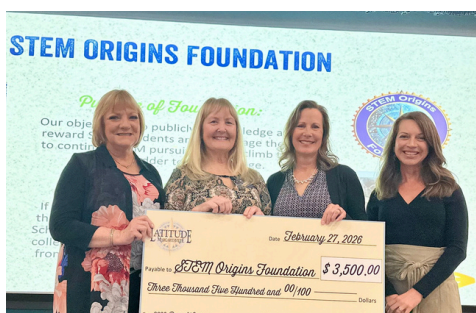
Professionally, Greg is a Fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers and has contributed to the development of two standards used in the analysis and design of nuclear facilities: ASCE 4 and ASCE 43. He is also a registered professional engineer in Missouri, Georgia, and New Mexico.

When he is not digging into seismic analyses or writing technical reports, Greg can be found at home with his wife Regina in Panama City Beach, where the pace is a little slower but the curiosity that has guided his career is still very much alive. Greg now shares that same curiosity with students of all ages, encouraging young scientists to ask questions and test their ideas while mentoring for STEM Origins. He also enjoys working with older students to explore career paths in science and engineering. For Greg, supporting the next generation of curious minds is simply another way to keep the questions coming.

In Appreciation

The STEM Origins Foundation was the honored recipient of a \$3,500 grant from the Latitude at Watersound Foundation on February 27th at the 2026 Latitude Watersound Day of Giving event. Thank you to the residents of Latitude at Watersound for acknowledging our efforts to impact Bay County and helping us to achieve this grant, which will be used for college scholarships for students in Bay County Schools!

The STEM Origins Foundation expresses deep appreciation for a \$24,000 grant from The St. Joe Community Foundation, Inc. This generous support will bring exciting STEM tools and equipment to four wonderful Bay District Schools: Oscar Patterson Academy, Bozeman Elementary, Walsingham Academy, and Lucille Moore Elementary. Thank you for investing in our students' bright futures, and helping to "Put the 'A' Back in Bay!"



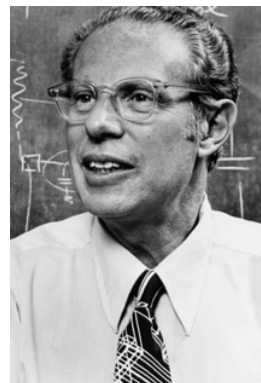
Thank You, Robert Adler!

Many of us remember when the “remote control” for the TV wasn’t a device... it was a kid. If parents wanted to change the channel or adjust the volume, they called someone to walk across the room and turn the dial. That changed thanks to inventor Robert Adler.

Adler created the first practical wireless television remote control, introduced by Zenith in 1956 as the Space Command. More than nine million televisions were sold with the device before infrared remotes became common in the 1980s.

Born in Vienna, Austria, in 1913, Adler earned a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Vienna and joined Zenith Electronics in the United States in 1941. After working on military communications during World War II, he turned his attention to improving television technology.

Adler’s remote used ultrasound, which are sound waves beyond human hearing. Pressing a button struck aluminum rods that produced tones the television recognized as commands. For decades, his invention let viewers stay comfortably seated—and spared countless kids from remote-control duty.



U.S. Patent No. 2,817,025

Inducted in 2008

Born December 4, 1913 - Died February 15, 2007

Attribution: <https://www.invent.org/inductees>

Upcoming Events

- 25 March: Bay District Schools Invention Convention at GCSC, 8AM-1PM
- 26 March: Bay County Block Party, 5PM-7PM
- 08 April: LMWS Farmers Market, 9AM-1PM
- 12 April: STEM Zone at the Gulf Coast Salute Airshow
- 26 April: Top Golf Fun(d)raiser to benefit Rising Star Scholarship Program, 1-3PM
- 09 May: Mowat School Science Boot Camp



Volunteer Opportunity

We are now partnering with the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center to bring their experiences into the Bay District Schools. Our first initiative is to explore ways to make this a part of the summer Bay Base program, so stay tuned for more on that soon.



Volunteer opportunities are available to teens 16+, college students, adults, and retired individuals!



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE:

- Environmental education
- Outreach
- Event support
- Animal care



WHY SHOULD YOU VOLUNTEER?

- Receive Community service hours
- Support environmental conservation
- Learn new skills
- Be a part of a community
- Make a difference



Contact Sarah Armbruster, Volunteer Coordinator, for further information! sarmbrustereowilsoncenter.org



Inspiring Young Scientists at Hutchison Beach Elementary

STEM Origins Foundation volunteers had a great time participating in the STEM Night at Hutchison Beach Elementary School on February 19th. Brian Maxwell, Greg Mertz, Mare Malone, Mark Wheeler, and Patty Matthews spent the evening sharing hands-on STEM activities with K-5 families.

Students explored simple circuits using conductive play-dough and learned about open, closed, and reversible circuits while testing their ideas. The Van de Graaff generator was a popular stop, where students experienced static electricity firsthand. At the digital microscope station, students examined minute details of everyday items like leaves, feathers, and paper money. Many rounds of magnetic chess captivated young minds.

Thanks to STEM teacher Olivia Breeze for organizing a fun, well-attended event. We appreciated the invitation and enjoyed supporting an evening of family STEM exploration.



Fun(d)raising

Spring Top Golf Fundraiser: Three hours of unique golf games and fun with friends will include a food buffet, soft drinks, and tips. Tickets can be purchased at our website through April 13th, and will benefit our Rising Star Scholarship Program.

Link to purchase tickets:
<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/spring-topgolf-event--2025>
Note that “tips” do not benefit our organization or the scholarships. You may still complete your purchase with a \$0 tip!



STEM Origins - Top Golf Spring Fundraiser 26 Apr 2026



- **12pm-3pm:** 26 April 2026
- **3hr** Experience, w/ Food Buffet, Soft Drinks & Tips incl.

2 Price Tiers:

- Now - **13 Mar:** **Early Bird rate = \$65/ea**
- 14 Mar - **16 April:** **Reg Rate = \$78** (same as our last event)

For Tickets go to: www.stemorigins.org or <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/spring-topgolf-event--2025>

- **Great Value, Great Fun**
- Reg retail price for Sunday afternoon is \$52/hr = **\$156/3hrs**

• Also Seeking Corporate Sponsors

“Robo-Bolts” Advance to International Competition

Students from Holy Nativity Episcopal School in Panama City are celebrating an exciting achievement after competing in the FIRST LEGO League Florida State Championship on February 21, 2026, in St. Petersburg.

Competing as the Robo-Bolts, the team is part of the school’s Integrated Technology Club and is coached by Jan Dykes and Jeremy Brannon. With eight rookies on their 10-student team, the Robo-Bolts earned a Finalist Award for their Innovation Project while competing against 55 of Florida’s top robotics teams.

Their strong performance earned them an invitation to the Western Edge International Invitational, taking place May 29-31, 2026, in Long Beach, California, where they will represent Northwest Florida while competing with teams from around the world.

The team is currently seeking community support to help cover the \$2,000 competition entry fee and travel expenses. Community members interested in supporting the Robo-Bolts can contact Jan Dykes at 850-896-1807.



Catastrophic RAMifications Team Returns from States

After a successful season of growth and competition, the Catastrophic RAMifications robotics team from Rutherford High School recently returned from their first appearance at the FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) Florida State Championship.

Competing in the Scott Division, the second-year team finished 11th out of 30 teams and posted an impressive season record of 23-7-0. The team also achieved a high match score of 204 points while competing among the top 256 FTC teams in Florida.

For the students, the experience extended well beyond the competition field. Team members connected with other robotics teams from across the state, volunteered in key event roles, and had the opportunity to learn from veteran FTC competitors.

Coach AJ praised the team’s progress throughout the season, saying, “For all the students, coaches, and parents, there has been incredible development, and we are so proud of this second-year team’s achievements.”

The team also expressed appreciation to their sponsors, community partners, families, and Rutherford High School for their continued support. With valuable experience now behind them, the Catastrophic RAMifications are already looking ahead to next season.



Beyond Graphite: The Search for Better Batteries

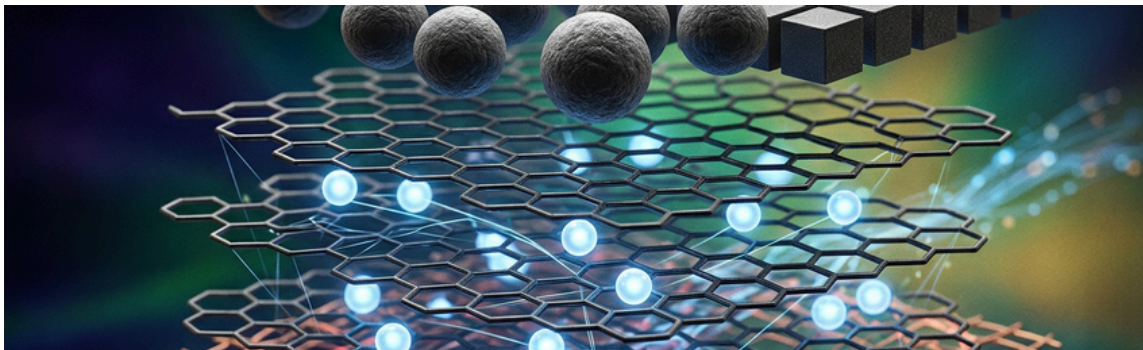
Batteries power nearly every part of modern life, from smartphones and laptops to electric vehicles and renewable energy systems. As our dependence on portable power grows, researchers are racing to develop batteries that last longer, charge faster, and deliver more energy.

For decades, graphite has been a key material used in many battery designs, particularly in lithium-ion batteries. While graphite has proven reliable, scientists and engineers are exploring whether other materials could perform even better. New metals and advanced materials may allow batteries to store more energy, improve safety, and reduce charging times.

Researchers are currently studying alternatives that could boost battery performance, while also addressing supply and sustainability challenges. Some of these materials could enable the next generation of high-performance batteries needed for electric transportation, grid storage, and emerging technologies.

The search for better battery materials highlights the role of engineering and materials science in solving real-world challenges. As innovation continues, new battery technologies could reshape how we power everything from our devices to entire cities.

To learn more, read the full feature in the February issue of *Mechanical Engineering*.



About Us

Our mission is to support local education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) with projects that inspire students and teachers at every level of the academic ladder from kindergarten through college.

We seek to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of high school and college STEM graduates. Our approach involves engaging students early (K-5) to foster interest in STEM subjects and maintaining engagement throughout middle school, high school, and college with progressively advanced activities.

Programs include providing hands-on experiences, classroom equipment, and

access to STEM professionals through visits, virtual presentations, and coaching on innovation and long-term goals. We plan to offer scholarships for college STEM fields and STEM camps for all grade levels overtime. Additionally, we support STEM teachers through grants for career development, professional growth, and innovative classroom experiments to enhance student learning experiences.

The STEM Origins Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Bay County, Florida. IRS Certification, Articles of Incorporation, and By-Laws are available on our [website](#). Also visit us on [Facebook](#).

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