



ORIGINS

STEM Origins Foundation

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In this issue:

2026 Scholarships

Why STEM Matters

Top Golf: Oct 25th

Origin Story

Spiders in Space?

Wally Funk

About Us

Our 2026 Rising Star Scholars!

The STEM Origins Foundation is proud to introduce the second annual group of students selected for our Rising Star Scholarship Program. This exciting initiative recognizes outstanding fifth graders throughout Bay County who have demonstrated exceptional skills, curiosity, and passion for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Each chosen scholar is awarded a college scholarship, which is securely held for them until they graduate from high school and enroll at Gulf Coast State College to pursue a STEM-related degree. By planting the seeds of higher education early, this program uniquely leverages the proven power of

long-term incentives to nurture and sustain STEM interests during a child's most formative years.

To celebrate these achievements, our second annual awards ceremony was held at Gulf Coast State College on June 11th. The selection process remains highly competitive and merit-based. Local fifth-grade teachers nominate their top pupils, who are then evaluated on their demonstrated academic aptitude, enthusiasm for STEM subjects, collaboration skills, and an excellent work ethic, all commensurate with age-appropriate expectations. Thanks to an expanding network of support, the

foundation was honored to fund 15 scholarships this year, recognizing brilliant young minds from 12 different Bay District Schools.

An early investment of this nature is a profound commitment to our children and to the future of our country's talent pipeline. If we want our communities to lead in innovation, we must start by making STEM education tangible and exciting from an early age, supporting these students step by step as they climb the academic ladder.

We are incredibly grateful to Bay District Schools and Gulf

See Rising Star Scholars, pg. 2

Rising Star Scholars (Continued)

Coast State College for supporting our efforts and making this ceremony possible.

Please join us in congratulating our 2026 Rising Star Scholars:

- Ryan Faranda, Breakfast Point Academy
- Elijah Harrell, Cedar Grove Elementary
- Bryson Ziemann, Deane Bozeman School
- Branch Touchton, Deer Point Elementary
- Anderly Marin, Hutchison Beach Elementary
- Ruby Yates, Lucille Moore Elementary
- Cinthia Cabrera, Lucille Moore Elementary
- Ben Ennis, Merriam Cherry Street Elementary

- Trevor Cummings, Oscar Patterson Academy
- Clara Coats, Oscar Patterson Academy
- Isabella Cervantes, Parker Elementary
- Addy Freel, Patronis Elementary
- Leilani Bysina, Patronis Elementary
- Asher Conner, Waller Elementary
- Mason Ball, A. Gary Walsingham Academy

To continue expanding the reach of this valuable program and inspiring more young learners, we are actively seeking new donors and community partners. If you are interested in supporting this vital effort, please contact us today.



Students pictured, from left: Isabella Cervantes, Ben Ennis, Asher Conner, Trevor Cummings, Anderly Marin, Bryson Ziemann, Branch Touchton, Ryan Faranda, and Addy Freel. Also pictured are Mark Bradshaw (President) and Pamela McCarthy (Vice President) of the STEM Origins Foundation.

Why STEM Matters Now

The challenges facing the world—from environmental issues to public health to technological transformation—require creative problem solvers. STEM education equips students with the tools to tackle these challenges and lead the innovations that will shape the future.

Investing in STEM education today means investing in the next generation of thinkers, builders, and leaders. Supporting STEM education can make a real difference for your community. Together, we can inspire the next generation of innovators and ensure students have the skills they need to thrive in tomorrow's world.

How you can get involved:

- Mentoring or volunteering with the STEM Origins Foundation
- Supporting robotics and science competition teams
- Encouraging students to explore STEM learning opportunities
- Donating to organizations that expand STEM access

Reach out to us at

<https://stemorigins.org/contact/> if you're interested in supporting our efforts to inspire future STEM leaders.



SAVE THE DATE!

Looking for a fun way to support local STEM education? Join us for a special fundraiser at the TopGolf in Panama City Beach on Sunday, October 25th from 12:00 to 3:00 PM. This exciting event is not just about golf, it's about bringing our community together to help more students discover the joy of science, technology, engineering, and math. And don't worry if you're not a golfer. This is a no-pressure, fun-for-everyone event!

Tickets will be on sale soon and include 3 hours of TopGolf play with golf clubs and balls, and a full buffet with unlimited soft drinks. All proceeds help us support STEM programs for local students in elementary, middle, and high school. Ticket information coming soon!



Origin Story: The Buzz that Sustains Us

In 1851, Lorenzo L. Langstroth revolutionized agriculture by inventing the modern beehive. Based on his discovery of "bee space"—the precise gap bees leave open—his design introduced removable frames. This allowed sustainable hive management and health inspections without destroying colonies. Today, 75% of global beehives still utilize this engineering.

This breakthrough secured the global food supply. Honeybees pollinate one-third of human food, including essential crops like almonds and berries, contributing billions to agriculture annually.

Beyond farming, honeybees act as natural pharmaceutical factories. Honey serves as an effective topical antibiotic and barrier for wounds. Additionally, substances like propolis provide strong antimicrobial properties, while recent research explores bee venom peptides for treating cancer and inflammation. From supporting global food production to offering advanced medical remedies, Langstroth's elegant engineering continues to protect these vital insects and impact human life daily.

U.S. Patent No. 9,300

Inducted in 2007

Born Dec. 25, 1810 - Died Oct. 6, 1895

Source: National Inventors Hall of Fame



Spiders in Space?

Nefertiti was a jumping spider selected for a unique mission. She traveled to the International Space Station as part of a study to observe how her species would adapt to hunting in microgravity. Her natural hunting strategy relies on precise leaps and accurate visual targeting. Aboard the station, the spider learned to adjust her jumps to account for the lack of gravity. She successfully captured prey, demonstrating her remarkable adaptability. After 110 days in orbit, she returned to Earth. Back on solid ground, Nefertiti quickly recalibrated her movements to function in normal gravity. The experiment provided valuable insights into how animals can adapt to space environments. Nefertiti was a tiny spider that made a giant leap for science!



Remembering Wally Funk



Aviation giant Mary Wallace "Wally" Funk passed away at 87, leaving a legacy of fierce resilience. Funk logged over 19,600 flight hours, taught 3,000 pilots, and became the FAA's first female flight inspector.

In 1961, she excelled in physical testing for the "Mercury 13" women-in-space program. Despite outperforming male astronauts, NASA blocked women from flying, rejecting her applications four times. Undeterred, Funk pivoted to become the NTSB's first female air safety investigator. Her ultimate triumph came on July 20, 2021, when she flew aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket at age 82, becoming the oldest woman in space. She will be posthumously inducted into the International Space Hall of Fame.

For future STEM innovators, Funk's life offers vital wisdom: view setbacks as detours, forge your own path, and let excellence shield you against systemic barriers. Never let anyone define your limits.

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 offer scholarships for college STEM fields and STEM camps for all grade levels. 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](https://stemorigins.org/). Also visit us on [Facebook](#).

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