



ORIGINS

STEM Origins Foundation

August 2026



Your Next Big Role: STEM Volunteer

Are you retired from a career in education or STEM? Retirement opens the door to a wealth of new possibilities, offering the time to explore hobbies, travel, and reflect on a lifetime of personal and professional accomplishments. For many retirees in our community, it also brings a desire to stay engaged, active, and deeply connected to a meaningful purpose. If you are looking for a rewarding way to channel your experience, skills, and wisdom, volunteering with the STEM Origins Foundation provides a unique opportunity to build a lasting legacy.

You do not need to be a retired rocket scientist or a lifelong

software engineer to make a profound difference. True STEM volunteering is not about lecturing from a textbook or grading complicated equations; it is about fostering curiosity and serving as an encouraging guide. Volunteer opportunities are open to anyone from any background, not just those with a STEM background.

A Day in the Life of a STEM Volunteer

What does a volunteer actually do? Picture a local elementary or middle school classroom buzzing with activity during a STEM Night. A handful of students are huddled around a table, trying to create a circuit that will power

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a light bulb. As a volunteer, you might ask guiding questions or model possible solutions.

When a student's magnetic design collapses, you are there to offer a reassuring word. You ask open-ended questions like, "What do you think we could change to make the connection stronger?" Instead of giving them the answer, you give them the confidence to try again. Through these simple interactions, you transform a moment of frustration into a valuable lesson in resilience.

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STEM Volunteer (continued)

Beyond hands-on classroom activities, our volunteers play a vital role in our scholarship and mentorship programs. Whether you are sharing stories from your own career path, selecting students from local schools for recognition, or helping to organize community outreach events, your presence provides the consistency and mentorship that young minds need to thrive.

The Power of a Mentor

The impact of this work stretches far beyond a single afternoon. For many children, particularly those who might be the first in their families to pursue higher education, a volunteer is the very first person outside of their home to look them in the eye and say, “You are capable of doing difficult things.”



When a volunteer invests their time in a young student, it sends a powerful message. It shows them that their community cares about their future. Your patience, life experience, and

perspective can permanently shift how a child views their own potential, turning an abstract interest in science or math into a concrete, lifelong goal.



Discover a Renewed Sense of Purpose

Volunteering is a deeply mutual experience. While our students gain a trusted mentor, our volunteers discover a vibrant, renewed sense of connection. Our volunteers often comment that they are having just as much fun as the kids! Working with youth keeps your mind sharp, your days filled with laughter, and your social calendar active. You will join a dedicated group of like-minded peers who share your passion for community progress and long-term education. Your professional career may be complete, but your ability to inspire is just beginning. Your accumulated life experience is one of our community's most valuable resources, and the next generation is waiting to learn from you.

Let us know you may be interested at <https://stemorigins.org/contact/>

STEM Origins: Bowerman Designs the First Nike Shoe



William Bowerman
Modern Athletic Shoe
U.S. Patent No. 3,793,750

Did you know that one of the most famous athletic innovations in history started in a kitchen?

Before co-founding Nike, legendary University of Oregon track coach Bill Bowerman spent years tinkering with equipment to make his runners lighter and faster. In the early 1970s, he wanted to design a running shoe that had excellent traction on artificial tracks without using heavy metal spikes.

His breakthrough came from a moment of household curiosity: he poured liquid urethane directly into his wife's kitchen waffle iron. The resulting rubber sole featured raised nubs—similar to modern mountain bike tires—that provided incredible grip at a fraction of the weight of standard shoes. This "Waffle Trainer" design launched a global footwear revolution, proving that world-changing engineering often starts with simple curiosity and a willingness to experiment with everyday objects!

Inducted in 2014

Born Feb. 19, 1911 - Died Dec. 24, 1999

Military Service: U.S. Army

Source: National Inventors Hall of Fame

Upcoming Events

24 Aug - LMWS STEMTalk - Microplastics

12 Sept - LMWS Volunteer Fair

22 Sept - Student of the Month @ BDS

28 Sept - LMWS STEMTalk - Earthquakes, Tornadoes, and Hurricanes

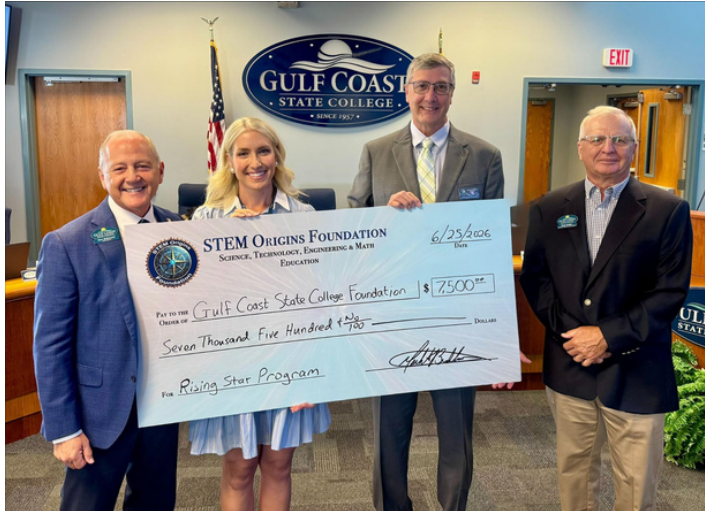
25 Oct - Top Golf Fundraising Event



Looking for a fun way to support local STEM education? Join us for a special fundraiser at **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, a full buffet, and unlimited soft drinks, plus tips. All proceeds help us support STEM programs for local students in elementary, middle, and high school. Look for more information coming soon.

Investing in Potential: The Story Behind the Big Check

On June 25th, the STEM Origins Foundation celebrated the second year of the **Rising Star Scholarship** program with a ceremonial check presentation, representing a formal pledge of support to the **Gulf Coast State College Foundation**. This year, the STEM Origins Foundation awarded \$500 scholarships to 15 outstanding grade five students.



These Rising Stars were highlighted in our July newsletter. The funds will be securely held and waiting for them at Gulf Coast State College when they complete their high school graduation.

Investing in students during the fifth grade provides a unique and powerful advantage. It offers a ten-year-old child a tangible, seven-year goal to work toward, establishing a clear academic destination on the other side of high school. In a very real way, this award demonstrates that community leaders believe in their potential enough to invest in their long-term success.

For students who would be the first in their family to attend college, this belief can transform the narrative at home. It helps dismantle the psychological barriers that too often prevent talented children from envisioning a future in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Furthermore, the impact of these scholarships extends far beyond the individual recipients. The recognition creates a powerful ripple effect that influences classmates, friends, and neighbors. When one child earns an award like this, it inspires peers to realize that higher education is achievable for them as well. Cultivating this widespread community inspiration is our objective.

The STEM Origins Foundation expresses sincere appreciation to Gulf Coast State College for partnering with us to make this initiative possible. Congratulations once again to all 15 of this year's Rising Stars. We look forward to watching you thrive on this exciting educational journey.

How Your Support Reaches Our Scholars

We want to share exactly how these \$500 scholarships move from our generous donors to our students' tuition bills:

- The presentation ceremony is our public promise to our scholars and the college, honoring the students' achievements and locking in their funding.
- To ensure total financial accountability, the actual scholarship funds are held by the STEM Origins Foundation in a secure account until students officially complete their college enrollment.
- Once enrollment is finalized, we disburse the funds directly to the GCSC Foundation, which administers the scholarship. This ensures 100% of the money goes exactly where it belongs: straight toward the student's education, fees, and books.
- Fun Fact: When you combine a scholarship from the STEM Origins Foundation with the "Gulf Coast Guarantee," the end result is a VERY affordable 2-year college education!

Grandparents Day at Latitude Watersound was a BLAST!!!

What a Grandparents Day to remember at Latitude Watersound (LMWS)! The **STEM Origins Foundation**, alongside our incredible community partners, filled the day with high-energy discovery, multi-generational learning, and unforgettable memories.

From ear to ear, the smiles said it all as children, parents, and grandparents teamed up to zoom through an array of interactive, hands-on STEM stations. The event proved to be immensely popular and exceptionally well-attended, with volunteers doing an outstanding job of engaging visitors of all ages in the joy of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

High-Flying Rockets and Wildlife Detectives

The specialized activities brought a dramatic flair to the celebration. Stations led by **Florida State University Panama City (FSU-PC)** featured thrilling rocket launches that quickly became a crowd favorite. The high-flying spectacles captivated the entire audience, with most young participants eagerly returning to launch their rockets multiple times.

Attendees also put their detective skills to the test at the **E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center** exhibit. Packed with fascinating wildlife artifacts and clever natural clues, the station invited families to play "guess the animal." Both children and adults found the interactive display deeply interesting, making it a clear standout of the day's festivities.

Visitors also enjoyed exploring the fundamental laws of physics firsthand through our many interactive stations, feeling the tactile spark of electricity & circuits, the tangible pull of magnets, and engineering success!

The personal impact of these interactions was clear. One attendee shared her enthusiasm on the community's social media page, noting that her grandsons had an absolute blast at the event. She highlighted how thrilled her one grandson was to meet two real-world engineers who personally encouraged his dream of one day becoming a NASA engineer! We thank our STEM Origins Mentors who were on site to encourage our young participants and help their grandparents witness a unique perspective.

Continued on page 6



Grandparents Day, Continued

Looking Ahead to an Even Bigger Future

The event's massive success has already sparked enthusiastic plans for next year. Organizers and partners were so thoroughly impressed by the community's response that discussions for an expanded footprint are already underway.

Gina Sanchez, LMWS Lifestyle Director, shared her excitement following the event, noting that the community cannot wait to start planning for next year to watch the children's engagement and interest grow even further. To accommodate the soaring attendance, plans are being made to extend the STEM stations directly into a larger space next year to provide families with even more room to explore.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Team and Partners

An event of this scale succeeds entirely on the dedication of the people behind it. The STEM Origins Foundation extends a special thank you to **Steve Pavelitz** for his outstanding leadership in coordinating all of the STEM activities and volunteers.

We are incredibly grateful to the dedicated volunteers who gave their time and energy to make Grandparents Day so spectacular (in alphabetical order):

- David Alexander
- Donna Alexander
- Kent Anthony
- David Blanks
- Kevin Chamberlain
- Lisa Lee
- Brian Maxwell
- Colin McCarthy
- Maureen Nerenbaum
- Ronald Quick
- Melanie Smith
- Trev Ramirez
- Dave Vavrek
- Renee Wise

We also extend our sincere appreciation to our partners who brought their expertise and passion to the event, including **Brianne Biddle**, **Antonio Lopez**, and **Lyndsay Sanders** from FSU, as well as **Nicole Schafer** and **Matthew Crane** with the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. Finally, thank you to the phenomenal **LMWS Lifestyle Activities Team** and every curious mind who stopped by to explore, discover, and play. Here is to inspiring more generations to learn, grow, and innovate together!



A \$1.4 Trillion STEM Talent Shortage Could Cost the U.S.

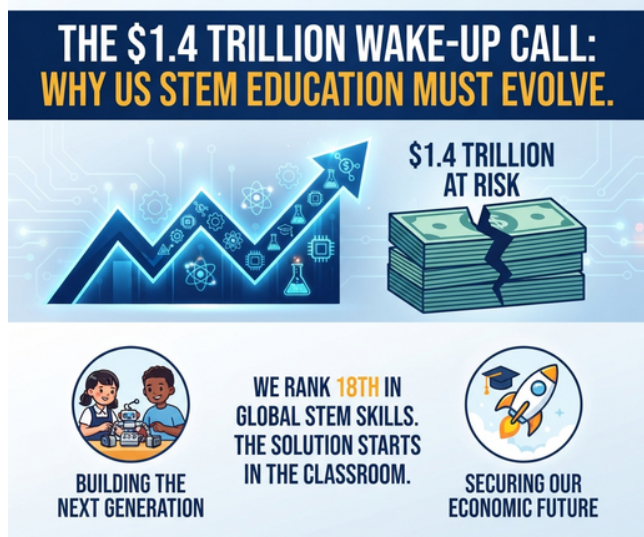
A robust pipeline of technical talent is essential for economic growth, innovation, and global competitiveness. However, according to the "STEM Skills Outlook 2026" report—detailed by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME)—the U.S. risks losing up to \$1.4 trillion in economic output over the next decade if the supply of STEM talent fails to match industry demand. Despite spending 3.5 percent of its GDP on R&D, the U.S. ranks 18th overall in the global STEM Skills Index due to weaknesses in foundational education.

As AI, automation, and data systems embed themselves across manufacturing, infrastructure, and energy, sectors are fiercely competing for the same pool of computing and engineering talent. While businesses invest heavily in advanced technologies, maximizing these returns requires qualified professionals to operate them. Currently, domestic STEM graduate growth is failing to keep pace.

At the STEM Origins Foundation, we believe building a sustainable talent pipeline requires systematic support. We must reinvest in classrooms, support educators, and create workforce reskilling opportunities to prevent these projected economic losses.

Stay tuned for next month's issue exploring reasons why students lose interest in STEM.

(Data sourced from [ASME](#), August 2026)



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 tools 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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