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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Connecticut Science Center Announces 2019 STEM Achievement Awards *The Science Center will honor Dr. Kristen Govoni, Dr. John Mertens, and the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative*

HARTFORD, CT (March 25, 2019) – The Connecticut Science Center celebrates individuals and organizations that share in its mission of lifelong learning through interactive and innovative experiences that explore our changing world through science. The honorees will be recognized at this year’s annual Awards Breakfast on April 23. Also recognized at the Awards Breakfast is the Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award. This award is presented to a woman working in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) who is a leader in her field, and who makes a significant effort to support other women and encourage girls’ interest in STEM. The event is generously presented by Stanley Black & Decker, with support from Burns & McDonnell.

The final honorees were chosen by the Science Center’s STEM Awards Selection Committee and Women in Science Steering Committee, from a list of numerous nominations submitted by the public. The 2019 honorees are; Dr. John Mertens, Professor of Engineering at Trinity College; the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative at UConn Health; Dr. Kristen Govoni, Associate Professor of Animal Science at the University of Connecticut.

“All those honored this year truly exemplify the Science Center’s mission of lifelong learning and advancing STEM education,” said the Connecticut Science Center’s President & CEO Matt Fleury, “This is an opportunity not only for us, but for the entire community to recognize those exemplar individuals and organizations making a difference. The work all of the honorees and finalists are doing is not only supporting our communities today, but also shaping our workforce of tomorrow. The future of Connecticut is bright due to the hard work of individuals and organizations such as these finalists and honorees.”



John Mertens, Ph.D. is the 2019 STEM Achievement Award Individual Honoree. He has been a professor of engineering at Trinity College since 1990 and has done volunteer work with Hartford Public Schools for most of that time. Through his work, Dr. Mertens has developed and supported after school and summer STEM programs with the help of many people, including many Trinity College students, to teach and encourage Hartford students to value and pursue education to develop fulfilling careers. He is passionate about teaching engineering and problem-solving and also has a strong interest in environmental science and public policy. His research area is experimental and computational combustion and air pollution.



The **Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative** is this year's STEM Achievement Award Organization Honoree. The program was developed by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs at UConn Health as a formal education consortium offering comprehensive educational enrichment and support activities for underrepresented and first generation students. The purpose of the program is to identify and develop a diverse applicant pool of students who will eventually enter a

health professions or STEM- related career. Activities are conducted for students in middle school through college. A major component of their activities is the specialized mentoring of all program participants: middle and high school students are mentored not only by faculty but also by college students and college students are mentored by graduate students and faculty. The Aetna HPPI programs have proven effective, as many program participants throughout its history have successfully completed their undergraduate degrees and have matriculated to competitive medical, dental, and graduate schools.



Kristen Govoni, Ph.D. is the 2019 Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award Honoree. Dr. Govoni earned her B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. (2003) degrees in Animal Science from the University of Connecticut. Her postdoctoral training was at the Musculoskeletal Disease Center in the Jerry L. Pettis VA Medical Center in Loma Linda, CA. Dr. Govoni joined the faculty in the Department of Animal Science at UConn in 2008, and her laboratory's current research focuses on understanding growth and development at the cellular level

to identify methods to improve animal health and efficiency of production. Dr. Govoni has secured over \$1.8 million in funding, published 37 peer-reviewed papers, and mentored 10 graduate, over 40 undergraduate, and 8 honors students, in research. Dr. Govoni teaches several courses, advises undergraduate students, and serves as the Faculty Director of the Women in Math, Science, and Engineering (WiMSE) Learning Community at UConn. Dr. Govoni lives in Lebanon, CT with her husband and two boys.

The Connecticut Science Center congratulates and thanks all 2019 finalists including: Women in Science Leadership Award finalists, **Dr. Shelly Jones**, Professor of Mathematical Science, CCSU; **Allison Ray**, Environmental Services Manager, Burns & McDonnell; **Dr. Beth Taylor**, Director of Exercise Physiology Research, Hartford Hospital and Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology, UConn; 2019 STEM Achievement Award Individual Finalist; **Chris Bennet**, Principal, William J. Johnston Middle School; and 2019 STEM Achievement Organization Finalist, **Connecticut Dream It Do It**.

Tickets are \$40 for the general public and \$35 for Connecticut Science Center Members and Corporate Member Employees. Tickets are on sale now and may be purchased online. For more information about the 2019 STEM Achievement Awards, presented by Stanley Black & Decker with support from the Burns & McDonnell, please visit CTScienceCenter.org/awards/.

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About the Connecticut Science Center: The LEED-Gold certified Connecticut Science Center, located in downtown Hartford, sparks creative imagination and an appreciation for science by immersing visitors in fun and educational hands-on, minds-on interactive experiences while maintaining an environmentally conscious presence. Serving over 3 million people since opening in 2009, the Science Center features more than 165 exhibits in ten galleries. Covering a range of topics, including space and earth sciences, physical sciences, biology, the Connecticut River watershed, alternative energy sources, Connecticut inventors and innovations, a children's gallery, and much more. Other features include four educational labs, a 200-seat 3D digital theater, function room, gift store, and ongoing events for all ages. The Science Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing science education throughout the state of Connecticut and New England, providing learning opportunities for students and adults of all ages, and engaging the community in scientific exploration. The Connecticut Science Center is also the home to the **Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Academy for Teachers**, offering powerful Professional Development for educators. More information: CTScienceCenter.org or (860) SCIENCE.