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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Connecticut Science Center Brings STEM Career Inspiration to Classrooms Virtually

2021 Kickoff Features Keynote from Stanley Black & Decker CTO Mark Maybury, and inspiring, diverse STEM Professionals as Program Attracts National Interest

Hartford, CT, January 6, 2021— The Connecticut Science Center has announced a full line-up of events to support its robust STEM Career Connections initiative in 2021. On January 28, the Connecticut Science Center is inviting grade 7-12 classrooms from across the nation to join a live interaction with top STEM professionals from global companies to explore career opportunities and pathways in an engaging format.

Responding to the need for powerful distance learning and resources for students and educators, the popular STEM Career Showcases have been adapted from in-person events to a virtual format, connecting STEM professionals with students remotely. The online format has allowed the Science Center to broaden its footprint to serve teachers and students from Connecticut and beyond. The first virtual Showcase in November attracted teachers from Connecticut, Michigan, and North Carolina and served more than 400 students.

“The last eight months have seen a devastating pandemic, during which the world has relied on STEM professionals to treat patients, guide public health policy, and, ultimately, to find, develop, and deliver treatments and vaccines,” said Matt Fleury, Connecticut Science Center President and CEO. “Now, perhaps more than ever before, it is painfully evident that our future relies on a continuous pipeline of curious, creative, and innovative problem-solvers, inspired at an early age.”

Students who attend a Virtual STEM Career Showcase have the opportunity to hear from panels of STEM professionals from a wide variety of fields who share their stories, daily work, and best pieces of advice. Geared toward middle and high school students, each Showcase consists of a tone-setting keynote presentation, followed by panel sessions and opportunities to ask questions and interact with panelists. The Virtual STEM Career Showcase seeks to empower students to consider jobs they may not have previously known existed or considered to be accessible.

To reflect the wide range of paths available, the January 28th Virtual Showcase presenters include ESPN, The Hartford, the Connecticut Department of Labor, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense, Stanley Black & Decker, and more.

Keynote Speaker:



Mark Maybury, Stanley Black & Decker's Chief Technology Officer and former Chief Scientist of the United States Airforce. Recently joining the Connecticut Science Center's Board of Trustees, Maybury is a dynamic leader with a fascinating career that includes working with artificial intelligence, defense, homeland security, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies. He will share his expertise on how technology will shape tomorrow's careers and what skills employers will be looking for.

In his current role at Stanley Black & Decker, a Fortune 500 American manufacturer of industrial tools and household hardware, Maybury is leading a team in a global ecosystem. His newly created position demonstrates that STEM skills translate to future career paths and opportunities that we may have not yet imagined.

Featured Presenters:



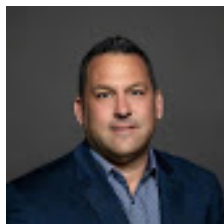
Dr. Ashley Varkey, D.O., Connecticut Children's Medical Center. Dr. Varkey is one of only 20 Pediatric Residents admitted annually as part of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics' 3-year program. She is currently in her second year of the highly regarded program that boasts Connecticut Children's Medical Center is the main teaching hospital. Dr. Varkey will give a glimpse into what a day in the life of a resident entails and how she started on her path toward a rewarding career in medicine.



Kudakwashe Chibanda, Director, Data Science, The Hartford. Kuda Chibanda has dedicated her career to helping companies make data-driven decisions. Over the years, she has worked in consulting roles as an actuary and data scientist. She currently leads a team at The Hartford that brings analytical rigor to low-frequency, high-severity lines of business — translate that as using data to predict the likelihood of catastrophic events and potential outcomes. Looking ahead to the next year and beyond, Chibanda hopes the industry can become more responsible in eliminating insurance data bias.



Steffany Halfrey, Develop Engineer, Separation and Destruct Systems, Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense Steffany Halfrey was a first-generation college student. She studied Aerospace Engineering and Material Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. There she founded WPIs Women in Aerospace group as part of a national movement to honor women in aerospace and aeronautics. She began her career in space, with an internship at Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense, followed by a full-time job there after graduation. As a Development Engineer, Steffany builds and tests explosive products, leads new product development programs, and mentors college students. She is currently pursuing her Masters of Science in Aerospace Engineering.



Michael Zigmont, Senior Product Manager, Fantasy Sports Product Development at The Walt Disney Company/ESPN Michael Zigmont holds four Disney patents and has won 6 Emmy Awards, including the George Wensel Award for Technical Achievement. In his role as Senior Product Manager, his primary responsibilities include the strategy behind ESPN's Fantasy App and the development of app features, like faster loading, playable notifications, and at-a-glance scorecards, and more. With over 20 years of experience, he has been a key player in the development of graphics for SportsCenter, NFL Primetime, and the NFL Countdown. He is also an advocate for accessibility in digital media.

Research shows that awareness of and interest in STEM careers at a young age is an even better predictor of future success than academic ability. Often, a lack of understanding of the breadth of possible STEM careers, or misconceptions about who can be successful in them, can discourage students from pursuing them.

“By building interest in STEM careers with a focus on twenty-first-century skills, the Connecticut Science Center is feeding the pipeline of future STEM employees,” said Megan Ramer, Connecticut Science Center Public Programs Manager. “Our data suggest that STEM Career Showcase participants become increasingly interested in and confident in their ability to pursue STEM careers and that they enjoy the opportunity to interact with professionals in an informal setting.” Ramer co-chairs the Connecticut Science Center STEM Career Connections advisory team. “We are grateful to be able to continue this work virtually and to serve students and teachers in a convenient, safe, and engaging format,” Ramer added.

The Virtual STEM Career Showcase is presented by Stanley Black & Decker and part of the Connecticut Science Center's STEM Career Connections initiative, presented by The Hartford and Cognizant U.S. Foundation with founding support from The Mandell-Braunstein Family.

Grant funding and program subsidies are available for some districts. To register and inquire about funding opportunities educators are encouraged to submit an inquiry form at CTScienceCenter.org/booking or contact a representative at 860-520-2150. Individuals, corporations, and organizations who would like to support STEM Career Connections should contact Whitney Gray at wgray@CTScienceCenter.org.

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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 more than 3.25 million people since opening in 2009, the Science Center features more than 165 exhibits in ten galleries and 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, a function room, a gift store, and ongoing events for all ages. The Science Center is a 501(c)(3) 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 of the Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Academy for Teachers, offering powerful professional development for educators. More information: CTScienceCenter.org or 860.SCIENCE.

About STEM Career Connections at the Connecticut Science Center: STEM Career Connections is the Connecticut Science Center's comprehensive initiative to inspire students to consider futures in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). It represents a deepening commitment to the illumination of STEM opportunities and pathways available in Connecticut and beyond. The program aims to develop team-oriented thinkers, innovators, and communicators by integrating STEM-related career content into our programs, exhibits, and events, fueling a diverse and successful STEM workforce for the next generation. The program is made possible by the support of The Hartford and Cognizant U.S. Foundation with founding support from The Mandell-Braunstein Family. More information: <https://ctsciencecenter.org/stem/>.