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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Connecticut Science Center Honors 2021 STEM Achievement Award Honorees and Finalists

The Science Center honored STEM Professionals from around the state at its Annual Gala: Thank You Science

October 7, 2021 - Hartford, CT – The Connecticut Science Center recognized the 2021 STEM Achievement Award and Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award honorees at its Virtual Gala: *Thank You Science* on October 2.

The STEM Achievement Awards, sponsored by Stanley Black & Decker, celebrates the achievements of professionals, groups, advocates, businesses, and leaders who share the mission to inspire lifelong learning through interactive and innovative experiences that explore our changing world through science. The 2021 Individual Honoree is Tara Jo Holmberg, MA, MEd, MS, a Professor of Environmental Science and Biology at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. The 2021 STEM Achievement Award Individual Finalists are Jordan A. Greco, Ph.D, Chief Scientific Officer at LambdaVision, Inc. and Greg M. Jones, Vice President of Community Health and Engagement at Hartford HealthCare. This year's Organizational Honoree is the Natural Resources Conservation Academy at the University of Connecticut.

The Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award Individual Honoree is Andrea Kwaczala Ph.D, a Biomedical Engineering faculty member at Western New England University. The award recognizes a woman working in STEM who is a leader in her field, and who makes a significant effort to support other women and encourage girls' interests in STEM. The honoree is selected by the Connecticut Science Center's Women in Science steering committee.

"For the first time ever, the Science Center has added the STEM Achievement and Women in Science Youth Award categories in 2021." Said Matt Fleury, President & CEO of the Connecticut Science Center. "Students, such as the ones nominated for our awards, embody our mission here at the Connecticut Science Center. We are thrilled to be able to honor these students making great accomplishments in STEM."

The 2021 STEM Achievement Award Youth Honoree is Joel Torres and the Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award Youth Honoree is Sivani Arvapalli. The student achievement award recognizes and celebrates a student in grades 8-12 who has shown curiosity, achievement, and/or

leadership in one or more STEM fields. This could be through promoting STEM Education in the school or community, or through the creation and development of a novel product or technology tool.

About the 2021 Honorees:



Tara Jo Holmberg, MA, MEd, MS is the 2021 STEM Achievement Award Individual Honoree. Tara Jo is a Professor of Environmental Science and Biology and is entering her 20th year of teaching at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. An award-winning educator, she facilitates a wide variety of courses in the life and Earth sciences and is the Coordinator for the Natural Resources Programs. Tara Jo incorporates service learning, citizen/community science, and high-quality, real-world, data into her classes. Her focus is on inquiry-based, active learning opportunities for students to achieve their goals.

Her own goal as an educator is to reignite the curiosity and wonder that students have often lost about science and the natural world. A Teacher Ambassador for BioInteractive (of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute), she facilitates professional development opportunities for high school and higher education faculty from local to international sales. Beyond life and environmental science mentoring, Tara Jo also works in the interdisciplinary areas of technology-supported education, inclusive and accessible teaching, and culturally- relevant pedagogy. She is a published scholar of biology education research, regularly presents at conferences, and is heavily engaged in the work of the National Association of Biology Teachers. Finally, she is a Board Member for a local conservation organization, volunteers in her community, and is currently pursuing her PhD in Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies.



Andrea Kwaczala, PhD. is the 2021 Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award Honoree. Andrea is a Biomedical Engineering faculty member at Western New England University. She is passionate about building assistive devices to help people with limited mobility. Her work has spanned from the design of golf assistive devices, low-cost prosthetic technology, to her favorite project, building electric cars for kids at Shriners Hospitals for Children. She inspires her students to pursue and persist in STEM careers by promoting technical skills. She uses makerspace activities

that use a constructionist approach to recognize the societal impact of our innovations. She is actively involved in the Society of Women Engineers and serves as the Outreach Chair of the Hartford Chapter. In outreach, Andrea lives for opportunities to inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers, tinkerers, and builders to think big, come up with novel ideas and to learn through failure.



Joel Torres is the 2021 STEM Achievement Award Youth Honoree. Joel is currently a student at Pathways Academy of Technology and Design and is a graduate of the Connecticut Science Center's Teen Innovation Program. Joel was a member of the Teen Innovation Program for 4 years, working on new demonstrations that were then presented to Science Center visitors. Through the program and the experiences he has had over the last 4 years, Joel has discovered his passion for STEM, specifically electrical engineering. He was able to go out on the floor and interact with Science Center visitors frequently, finding that educating others on his passion is very rewarding. He will be attending the University of Connecticut, majoring in Electrical Engineering. One piece of advice Joel carries around with him for others is to "...step out of your comfort zone, and try new things. One just never knows exactly what they are capable of, or what they are passionate about unless you try something new."



Sivani Arvapalli is the 2021 Petit Family Foundation Women in Science Leadership Award Youth Honoree. She is the technology captain of her Science Olympiad team and has earned numerous medals in state-wide competitions. Sivani is highly involved with FIRST robotics as she has mentored various FIRST Lego League (FLL) teams and even hosted her town's first FLL event with South Windsor FIRST. Sivani is her team's plasma cutter and a key member of the marketing and business administration team. In addition, Sivani is the founder and president of the Be The Change Club, a club that aims to teach kids the importance of volunteering. She is also the vice president of the Model UN Club and president of the Interact Club. She strives to challenge herself academically with rigorous STEM classes such as AP Computer Science and AP Biology. Her most significant achievements include being named Connecticut's Volunteer of the Year in 2018 by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards and being named a Dean's List Finalist for New England.

The Natural Resources Conservation Academy at the University of Connecticut is the 2021 STEM Achievement Award Organization Honoree. The Academy has been empowering teens, adult volunteers, undergraduate & graduate students, and teachers statewide by providing professional development & leadership opportunities and



Natural Resources Conservation
Academy
University of Connecticut

supporting participant lead community conservation efforts. They have provided a direct assist to land conservation work statewide and helped foster the next generation of environmental stewards. The NRCA uses an innovative leadership framework that supports the implementation of environmental solutions, and crosses age and ability boundaries to develop a more inclusive and equitable environmental sector. Collectively, 260 community conservation projects have been carried out by NRCA teen-adult partnerships.

For more information about the Connecticut Science Center's mission and work, 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 3.5 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.