



## News from the Connecticut Science Center

### ▶▶▶ Science and Play: A Powerful Combination for Student Learning

Connecticut's recent legislation supporting play-based learning in pre-K and elementary classrooms embraces a transformative approach long supported by child development experts: learning through play.

When children engage in open-ended play, they're not just imagining—they're exploring, iterating, building resilience, and having fun. Incorporating STEM activities encourages children to embrace challenges, collaborate, and apply concepts to real-world scenarios.

STEM and play bring benefits that go far beyond the classroom, allowing families to explore science together at home, on playgrounds, and in community spaces like the Science Center. Over the past four years, the Science Center has worked with partners to measure the impact of play to support the STEM topics that are at the forefront of our programs, exhibits, and community partnerships. We've collaborated with the LEGO Foundation and the LEGO Playful Learning Museum Network, alongside 18 other museums and experts in play-based learning, to ensure play is meaningfully embedded into our museum experiences and study its influence.

This project makes it clearer than ever that integrating play-based learning into science and engineering activities has deepened student engagement, encouraged collaborative problem-

solving, and fostered resilience. **At the end of their Science Center experiences, nearly 85% of students reported increased enjoyment in exploring science and engineering, with more than 86% feeling more empowered to think creatively and work collaboratively. Students expressed a more substantial interest in STEM and pride in their problem-solving accomplishments.**

Through this initiative, we've broadly shared our practices, partnering with the Connecticut Network for Children and Youth to train more than 100 program leaders, empowering them to create and lead hands-on STEM activities. Feedback from our Learning through Play workshops shows that program leaders felt confident adapting STEM activities to make STEM topics more accessible and engaging.

The Science Center looks forward to continuing to provide enjoyable educational opportunities for families, schools, and community partners to experience fun and interactive science and to share these effective practices with schools and households across Connecticut. ■



The Connecticut Science Center inspires lifelong learning through interactive and innovative experiences that explore our changing world through science.

## "Cultivating" Our Future Innovators: Trustee Melinda Thompson Reflects on the Importance of Giving



My journey with "cultivation" began long before my professional life. Growing up, I spent hours in my grandparents' garden, harvesting the vegetables

that became the foundation of my Abuelita's cooking. Later, this love for plants led me to pursue a minor in Environmental Horticulture while majoring in Agricultural and Managerial Economics at the University of California, Davis. I've always loved the connection between the botanical world and the sciences. My studies showed me how interconnected the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics truly are.

Today, it's impossible to ignore how much technology is shaping our planet's future. This is why organizations like the Connecticut Science Center are so vital. The Science Center inspires

lifelong learning through interactive, innovative experiences that spark curiosity in young minds and helps nurture tomorrow's inventors, problem-solvers, and leaders—people who will protect and sustain our planet's precious resources.

Supporting the Science Center is an easy decision for me, its mission aligns with my values. Whether it's through donations, volunteering, or simply spreading the word, getting involved can make a big difference. It's a place that can ignite a love of science in visitors of all ages and inspire the next generation of innovators.

Melinda Thompson is Head of Personal Lines at The Hartford and Connecticut Science Center Trustee

To learn more about giving opportunities or ways to get involved please contact April Paterno, Vice President of Governance & Development at [apaterno@ctsciencecenter.org](mailto:apaterno@ctsciencecenter.org) or Whitney Gray, Director of Institutional Giving at [wgray@ctsciencecenter.org](mailto:wgray@ctsciencecenter.org)

## Exploring Space Exhibition Now Open!

The Connecticut Science Center has opened its renovated *Exploring Space* exhibition, its largest new exhibit since opening 15 years ago.

The completely reimagined exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the cosmos, offering a look at our universe and humanity's future in space. Through Earth-based astronomy, human exploration, and deep-space observation, the exhibition expands our understanding of the universe and prepares us for distant missions. Visitors become part of the adventure with hands-on activities, multimedia, artifacts, and personal stories, experiencing

liftoff, traveling through the solar system, exploring deep space, and stepping into a space-station to discover the challenges and opportunities of living in space.



Photo: Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam, Science Center Board Chair Len Wolman, Dave Kametz of Ensign-Bickford Aerospace & Defense, Science Center President & CEO Matt Fleury, and Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz cut the ribbon to reopen the *Exploring Space* exhibition.

## Welcome to New Trustees: Dr. Jessica Abrantes-Figueiredo, Amy Comer, and Karen Lott

The Connecticut Science Center is pleased to announce the election of Dr. Jessica Abrantes-Figueiredo, Amy Comer, and Karen Lott to the Board of Trustees and looks forward to their leadership in providing inspirational STEM experiences.



**DR. JESSICA ABRANTES-FIGUEIREDO** is the chief of infectious disease at St. Francis Hospital and is an assistant professor at UCONN School of Medicine. Along with treating patients daily, she serves the greater community with several educational and advocacy positions.



**AMY COMER** is Vice President of the Geared Turbo Fan Jet Engine Programs at Pratt & Whitney. Ms. Comer is a mechanical and aerospace engineer by background, with 20 years in the jet engine business. She is a long-time Connecticut Science Center supporter and an advocate for women in STEM and educational opportunities for students.



**KAREN LOTT** has an extensive career in K-12 education. She is currently Executive Director of Women's League Child Development Center in Hartford. Ms. Lott is an instrumental partner in helping the Science Center build STEM experiences for early learners and their families. In 2023, under her leadership, the Women's League Child Development Center was recognized as a Connecticut Science Center STEM Achievement Award honoree.

The Connecticut Science Center thanks Carmen R. Cid, PhD, Geoff Hunt, Theodore S. Sergi, PhD, and Laine Taylor, DO, MBA for their years of dedication to our organization as they conclude their service on the Board of Trustees.



Visitors celebrate Día de los Muertos at the Science Center.



Visitors pose for a photo with Sonic and Knuckles during Sonic Weekend.



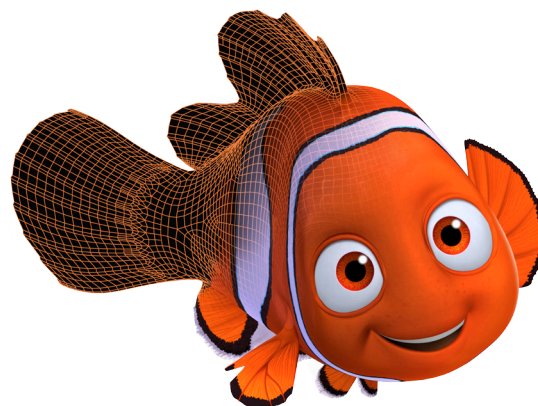
Students interact with representatives from General Dynamics Electric Boat during a STEM Career Showcase.



Representatives from Zygo help debut the Exploring Space exhibition Live Science programming that their partnership helped to create.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

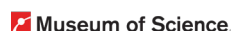
- FEB 1-2: FROZEN WONDERS WEEKEND
- FEB 4: TODDLER TUESDAY
- FEB 6: PATHWAYS TO STEM NIGHT
- FEB 9: SENSORY FRIENDLY DAY
- FEB 16-22: NATIONAL ENGINEERING WEEK  
*Presented by ABB Inc.*
- MAR 1: THE SCIENCE BEHIND PIXAR OPENS AND WOMEN IN SCIENCE SATURDAY
- MAR 11: TODDLER TUESDAY
- APR 2: SENSORY FRIENDLY DAY
- APR 12-13: POKEMON WEEKEND



## The Science Behind **PIXAR**

On Exhibit in 2025

Produced by



Sponsored by



The Science Behind Pixar was developed by the Museum of Science, Boston in collaboration with Pixar Animation Studios. © Disney/Pixar. All Rights Reserved. Used Under Authorization.

## SAVE THE DATE: Annual Gala: *Monster Mash*



**Don't miss out on the party of the year!**

Join us for the Annual Gala: *Monster Mash* on Saturday October 25, 2025 at the Connecticut Convention Center.

**Sponsorships Now Available  
Early Boo Tickets on Sale this Spring!**  
[ctsciencecenter.org/gala](http://ctsciencecenter.org/gala)

## FAN ART



**Thank you for your support of the Connecticut Science Center.**

The Connecticut Science Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

For additional information, contact:

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