



Higher Orbits

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Honoring out-of-this-world education supporters *Astronaut, high-school student and graphics designer celebrated*

Leesburg, Virginia — March 9, 2021 — Higher Orbits honors three top supporters committed to the nonprofit's mission that encourages the next generation of STEMists. Inaugural award recipients include an astronaut, a student ambassador and social-media influencer, and a graphics designer.

[Higher Orbits](#) is an educational nonprofit that partners astronauts with students creating research projects bound for space. Two-day *Go For Launch!* events develop science, technology, engineering, math, teamwork, leadership and communication skills.

[The Above and Beyond Astronaut Award was given to Astronaut Don Thomas](#) for participating in *Go For Launch!* events since Higher Orbits started. Thomas, who has flown in space four times, shares experiences and helps students assess future STEM needs and research. His commitment continues with Space at Home distanced-learning opportunities, too.

[The Stellar Student Ambassador Award went to Sophia Crowder](#), who attended a 2019 Higher Orbits *Go For Launch!* Full STEAM Ahead in North Carolina. Her team's project won the event series and is slated to launch to space. Crowder has since competed in other *Go For Launch!* events, represented Higher Orbits at the 2019 International Astronautical Congress in Washington, D.C., and shared her enthusiasm for space and STEM as a student ambassador via social media.

[The Higher Orbits Outstanding Volunteer Award was presented to Brian Chapman](#), the creative force who designs most of the nonprofit's flyers, brochures, logos, and posters. Chapman brings to life the hand-drawn patches created by the winning teams before projects launch to space. He designed the Space Prom and Space at Home patches, too.

“Really great people make you feel great,” said Crowder, who considers Thomas a mentor and wears patches created by Chapman. News of the awards was delivered by surprise video to each recipient.

“Another program might connect students to STEM/STEAM in a unique way, but I believe you won’t find anyone more passionate, qualified or dedicated than Michelle and the Higher Orbits team,” said Chapman. “I’ll always be grateful for the opportunity to play a small part in the effort to deliver a fantastic experience to students all over the country.”

“We are galactically grateful for all who give their time and expertise to Higher Orbits,” said Michelle Lucas, who launched the nonprofit in 2015. “Volunteers and supporters fuel the learning opportunities for our students and are critical to a successful mission.”

For more information about Higher Orbits, visit higherorbits.org or contact Lucas, media@higherorbits.org.

About Higher Orbits:

Higher Orbits is a 501(c)3 non-profit that uses spaceflight to promote science, technology, engineering, art and math while strengthening leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. Higher Orbits conducts *Go For Launch!* events across the country and partners with companies and organizations to launch the next generation of scientists, researchers and creators. Participants work with astronauts, scientists, and engineers during hands-on collaborative activities for awards that culminate with a project intended for space. A dozen Higher Orbits projects have flown to space. More are being developed. During the 2020 Commercial Space Leadership Awards, the Commercial Spaceflight Federation awarded Higher Orbits the Patti Grace Smith STEM Award for education and commitment to expanding knowledge to the next generation of commercial space pioneers. To learn more about 2021’s events and inspire the next generation of STEMists, STEAMists and explorers, visit HigherOrbits.org.

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