

10TH ANNIVERSARY • CHICAGO • JUNE 2026

# 10 Years. 100 *Go For Launch!* Events. One Incredible Milestone.

Join us in Chicago as Higher Orbits celebrates its 100th program and the future of the space workforce.

**MEDIA CONTACT**

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## ABOUT

# About Higher Orbits

Higher Orbits is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring the next generation through space exploration, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Through immersive programs such as [Go For Launch!](#), students work alongside astronauts, scientists, engineers, and industry professionals to develop leadership skills, explore career pathways, and engage in hands-on learning experiences.

For the past decade, Higher Orbits has created transformational opportunities for students around the world by connecting them directly with leaders in the space industry and providing access to experiences that inspire lifelong achievement.

**OUR MISSION**

Higher Orbits inspires students through space exploration and STEM education by connecting them with astronauts and industry leaders who encourage curiosity, leadership, and innovation.

**100**

GO FOR LAUNCH! EVENTS

**10**

YEARS OF IMPACT

**24**

EXPERIMENTS FLOWN TO SPACE

## Programs at a Glance

**Go For Launch!**

The flagship program. Teams of students work alongside astronauts, scientists, and engineers to design original space experiments. Winning experiments fly to the International Space Station.

**Higher Orbits Talks**

Direct conversations between students and astronauts, industry professionals, and STEM leaders, opening real career pathways and answering the questions students actually have.

**EASE**

Educational and Astronaut-led Space Experiences that bring the wonder of human spaceflight directly into classrooms and community programs.

**Stellar Soirée**

Annual celebration uniting astronauts, alumni, sponsors, and supporters to fund the next year of programming and recognize the people who make the work possible.

## MILESTONE

# 10 Years. 100 Go For Launch! Events.

In June 2026, Higher Orbits will mark a milestone no one in STEM education has hit before: ten years of programming and the [100th Go For Launch! event](#). For over a decade, the organization has brought astronauts and students together across the country to build the skills, confidence, and community that will define the next generation of space leaders.

What began as a single program has grown into an internationally recognized STEM education organization reaching students from diverse backgrounds and communities. Higher Orbits' impact spans educational programming, workforce development, mentorship, and opportunities that have helped students pursue careers in aerospace, medicine, engineering, entrepreneurship, and research.

## THEN AND NOW

Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger was the astronaut at Higher Orbits' very first *Go For Launch!* event ten years ago. In June, she returns to take part in the 100th, closing the loop on a decade of programming.

## Three Events. One Anniversary Week.

<p><b>Space-Inspired Symposium</b>  <b>JUNE 25–26, 2026 • CHICAGO, IL</b></p> <p>Two days of astronauts, industry experts, and special guests. A chance for alumni to mix, mingle, and meet others from across the country.</p> <p><i>Day 1: Salon 61, 61 W Hubbard St</i>  <i>Day 2: Museum of Science and Industry</i></p>	<p><b>The Stellar Soirée</b>  <b>JUNE 27, 2026 • CHICAGO, IL</b></p> <p>An evening of celebration marking a decade of launching the next generation of space leaders.</p> <p><i>Henry Crown Space Center, Museum of Science and Industry</i></p>	<p><b>The 100th Go For Launch!</b>  <b>JUNE 29, 2026 • DEERFIELD, IL</b></p> <p>Students, former NASA astronauts, and industry leaders come together for a hands-on mission day.</p> <p><i>Deerfield High School</i></p>
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## Event Highlights

- Former NASA astronauts in attendance (see page 5)
- Student-led mission simulations and presentations
- Alumni Rendezvous, a reunion for Higher Orbits alumni
- Hands-on STEM experiences and workshops
- Networking and mentorship opportunities
- Celebration of alumni success stories and organizational impact



## LEADERSHIP

# A Letter from the Founder

**Michelle Lucas**

*Founder and CEO, Higher Orbits*

Ten years ago, Higher Orbits began with a simple but powerful idea: give students real access to the people, experiences, and possibilities of spaceflight, and trust that they would rise to meet it. It stemmed from wishing that I had something like this in my "backyard" as a kid.

What started as a single program has grown into something far greater than I ever imagined. With the launch of our 100th *Go For Launch!* event, we are not just marking a milestone, we are celebrating a movement of students, alumni, mentors, and partners who believe that the future economy will be space-enabled.

From the beginning, we set out to equip students with the confidence, skills, and connections they need to see themselves in the space industry and beyond. Through hands-on experiences and direct mentorship from astronauts and professionals, students don't just learn about space, they begin to understand their place within it. They get the message, **there is a place in space for them.**

Over the past decade, we've watched students walk into our programs unsure of what's possible and leave with a new sense of direction. Today, many of those same students are pursuing careers in STEM, contributing to the aerospace workforce, and mentoring the next generation behind them. That is the impact that matters most.

As we gather in Chicago for our 10th Anniversary and the 100th *Go For Launch!* event, we are also looking ahead. The space industry is evolving rapidly, opening new doors, creating new challenges, and demanding a workforce that is not only technically skilled, but collaborative, adaptable, and diverse in thought and experience.

From agriculture to pharmaceutical research; from emergency response to supply chain and logistics, space is increasingly woven into the fabric of everyday life, and everyday industries.

This shift changes what workforce development must look like. The future of space is not limited to astronauts and engineers. It will require problem-solvers, communicators, analysts, entrepreneurs, and leaders across disciplines who understand how space connects to the world around them.

Higher Orbits is proud to be part of building that workforce, one that is not only prepared to participate in the space industry, but to apply space-enabled insights across a wide range of careers.

This milestone belongs to everyone who has been part of the journey: our students, alumni, astronauts, partners, sponsors, parents, friends, and supporters. Your belief in this mission has made it possible to reach farther, dream bigger, and continue building opportunities for those who will lead us into the next era of exploration.

*The first 100 events are just the beginning.  
The next decade will take us even further.*

## ASTRONAUTS IN ATTENDANCE

# Former NASA Astronauts Joining Us in Chicago

The 100th *Go For Launch!* event will bring together four former NASA astronauts who will engage directly with students, educators, and guests.

<b>Wendy Lawrence</b> Former NASA Astronaut <a href="#">→ Official NASA bio (PDF)</a>	<b>Kate Rubins</b> Former NASA Astronaut <a href="#">→ Official NASA bio (PDF)</a>
<b>Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger</b> Former NASA Astronaut <a href="#">→ Official NASA bio (PDF)</a>	<b>Don Thomas</b> Former NASA Astronaut <a href="#">→ Official NASA bio (PDF)</a>

**Editorial note on NASA references.** Per NASA guidance, individuals who have left the active astronaut corps should be referred to as "former NASA astronaut," not "NASA astronaut." Higher Orbits uses this language consistently and asks media partners to do the same.

## Why It Matters

Higher Orbits is on the verge of a milestone no nonprofit in STEM education has reached before: 100 *Go For Launch!* events in ten years. The anniversary week is a chance to recognize a decade of measurable impact, and to look ahead at the diverse, space-enabled workforce the next decade will require.

## IMPACT

# Alumni Success Stories

The clearest measure of Higher Orbits' impact is the alumni who carry their experience forward, into universities, into the aerospace workforce, and back into our programs as mentors.

## FULL CIRCLE IN CHICAGO

### From the first *Go For Launch!* to a Dragon capsule at the Stellar Soirée venue.

Chirag Goel was a student at the very first *Go For Launch!* event in Deerfield, IL in 2016. His team, DASA, won the inaugural Andromeda Division and their passive-shielding experiment launched to the ISS aboard CRS-12. The SpaceX Dragon capsule that carried their work is now permanently displayed at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, the venue hosting the Stellar Soirée. Chirag joined Higher Orbits' Board of Directors in January 2025.

[→ Read Chirag's full profile](#)

#### Abi's story

"It all started with a NASA shirt and messy space buns."

[→ Read the full story](#)

#### Rachel's story

"What started as childhood curiosity turned into a real direction for my future."

[→ Read the full story](#)

#### Nikhita's story

"From finding inspiration in futuristic spaceships to identifying a real-world problem."

[→ Read the full story](#)

#### Valentina's story

"The chemistry of opportunity."

[→ Read the full story](#)

#### Graham's story

"From the public library to the International Space Station." Library kid to Team Orion to a peer-reviewed Mars-shielding paper. Now at Stanford and Seneca.

[→ Read the full story](#)

#### Stella's story

"How one weekend changed everything." Lost the local round, scholarshiped to KSC, Team Laika's bacteria experiment flew to the ISS in 2023. UW-Madison engineering.

[→ Read the full story](#)

## FOR THE NEWSROOM

# Media Resources & Quick Links

<b>Press releases</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/news/">https://higherorbits.org/news/</a>	Newsroom and recent announcements
<b>Leadership bios</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/about-us/">https://higherorbits.org/about-us/</a>	About Higher Orbits and its leadership team
<b>Experiments in space</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/experiments-in-space/">https://higherorbits.org/experiments-in-space/</a>	Twenty-four student experiments and counting, flown to the ISS
<b>Sponsors and partners</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/sponsors-partners/">https://higherorbits.org/sponsors-partners/</a>	Current supporters of Higher Orbits' work
<b>Higher Orbits opportunities</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/higher-orbits-happenings/">https://higherorbits.org/higher-orbits-happenings/</a>	Upcoming events and programming
<b>Stellar Soirée</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org/stellar-soiree/">https://higherorbits.org/stellar-soiree/</a>	Annual fundraising gala
<b>Higher Orbits website</b> <a href="https://higherorbits.org">https://higherorbits.org</a>	Main organizational website

## Social Media Kit

**Sample post:** Higher Orbits is celebrating 10 years and 100 *Go For Launch!* events, helping build the future space workforce one student at a time. #HigherOrbits #STEM #SpaceEducation #SpaceInspires

**Suggested hashtags:** #HigherOrbits • #GoForLaunch • #STEMEducation • #SpaceInspires • #SpaceWorkforce • #FutureOfSpace • #HigherOrbits10

<b>Instagram</b> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/higherorbits/">https://www.instagram.com/higherorbits/</a>	<b>Facebook</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/higherorbits/">https://www.facebook.com/higherorbits/</a>	<b>LinkedIn</b> <a href="http://linkedin.com/company/higher-orbits-foundation/">http://linkedin.com/company/higher-orbits-foundation/</a>	<b>X / Twitter</b> <a href="https://x.com/HigherOrbits">https://x.com/HigherOrbits</a>	<b>YouTube</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@higherorbits">https://www.youtube.com/@higherorbits</a>
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# 100 PROGRAMS. 10 YEARS. 1 MISSION. LAUNCH THE NEXT GENERATION

For the past decade, Higher Orbits has connected students with astronauts and industry experts through hands-on experiences that build confidence, skills, and a pathway to the space-enabled future.

## OUR MISSION

Higher orbits prepares students to solve real-world challenges through teamwork, leadership, and STEM innovation- while opening doors to meaningful careers across a rapidly growing space-enabled economy

## OUR IMPACT

**EXPERIMENTATION**  
24 experiments flown to space with more to come

**ASTRONAUT-LED EXPERIENCES**  
real mentors & real connections

**FUTURE READY LEADERS**  
thousands of students, building the workforce of tomorrow

## OUR FUTURE

**AGRICULTURE**  
satellite data improves crop yields and resource management

**PHARMACEUTICALS**  
microgravity research advances drug discovery & development

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE**  
Real-time imaging and communications save lives and protect communities

## SPONSOR HIGHER ORBITS TO

Build the future workforce

Inspire & Empower the next generation

Strengthen your community

Amplify your brand

Be part of something bigger

## INVEST IN TOMORROW



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CHANGE LIVES.  
LAUNCH FUTURES.**

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