



RNASA

ROTARY NATIONAL AWARD
FOR SPACE ACHIEVEMENT

For Immediate Release

May 1, 2026

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RNASA Foundation honors Dr. Peggy Whitson and Stellar Winners



Dr. Peggy Whitson receiving the National Space Trophy from Vanessa Wyche.

HOUSTON, Texas (May 1, 2026). The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation presented the National Space Trophy (NST) to **Dr. Peggy Whitson** Vice President of Human Spaceflight at Axiom Space, at the annual RNASA black-tie Space Awards Gala on April 24, 2026, at the Houston Hyatt Regency.

RNASA Foundation Chairman **Rodolfo González** welcomed guests to the gala, saying, “this year we celebrate and honor the accomplishments of NASA and Axiom Space Astronaut Peggy Whitson and all of the 2026 stellar award winners. The RNASA Foundation recognizes achievement in space across the entire nation and across all sectors and we are incredibly honored to have so many visitors here from around the country.”

The **Clear Brook High School JROTC Color Guard** presented the colors, followed by **Danny Myers**, who sang the National Anthem. **Dr. Steven Laufer**, Senior Pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church, provided the invocation.

After dinner, the program kicked off with a year-in-review film by **Space City Films**. **Kristin Fisher**, Emmy Award winning independent space journalist and CNN contributor, served as the emcee. In her opening remarks, Kristin said, “We’re a moon fairing species once again. How good does that feel? I’m downright giddy to be here this year because I get to celebrate this moment with all of you.” When speaking about the social buzz generated by the recent Artemis II mission, she remarked “That is what success looks like in 2026, when you’re able to penetrate the mainstream in a moment when everyone is distracted by their phones. I want to thank everyone at NASA for making this mission so accessible...for giving the crew the bandwidth to do these unbelievable livestreams. It was the greatest reality TV show in the universe.”

Jason Kim, CEO of Firefly Aerospace, was the featured speaker for the evening. He commented, “We’re at a crossroads. We have reunited the world imagination. Now it’s our responsibility to carry that momentum forward. We must build cultures where hierarchy takes a backseat to good ideas, where questioning assumptions is encouraged, where innovation isn’t just reserved for the experienced but unlocked by the curious.”

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Stellar Awards were presented to 20 individuals and 7 teams. The Stellar Award winners were announced by NASA Astronauts **Anne McClain** and **Nichole Ayers**, who then presented them with engraved marble trophies. The Stellar Awards were presented in Early Career, Mid-Career, Late Career, and Team categories.

Vanessa Wyche, Johnson Space Center Director, presented the prestigious National Space Trophy to Peggy Whitson. While introducing Whitson, Vanessa commented “her accomplishments have shaped the future of space exploration and set new standards for what is possible. Peggy remains a pioneering force in human space exploration today.”

During her acceptance speech, **Whitson** remarked, “I’m often asked what is my superpower and I think my answer typically surprises people. It’s not being an astronaut, it’s not space walking, it’s not being a biochemist, my superpower is building teams. It’s the most important thing I’ve learned over the years. The best team is almost never the one with the most stars. The best team is where the people fit together, where their strength cover the gaps, where the personalities can withstand the bad days, where everyone knows what everyone is going to do. The way to survive change is not by being the best individual in the room but being part of a crew that can flex together as a team.”

Michael Lopez-Alegria, Axiom Space Chief Astronaut, presented an OMEGA Speedmaster watch to Whitson.

A portrait of Whitson was on display at the gala and used as the cover of the souvenir program. The portrait will become part of the National Space Trophy display at Space Center Houston for one year.

RNASA Chairman Rodolfo González concluded the evening by thanking the Foundation’s corporate sponsors whose support and achievements made the event possible: Aegis Aerospace Inc., Aerodyne Industries, The Aerospace Corporation, All Points Logistics, Amentum, ARES Corporation, ASRC Federal, Astrion, Axiom Space, Barrios Technology, Bastion Technologies Inc., Blue Origin, The Boeing Company, CACI, Deloitte, Draper, Firefly Aerospace, GeoControl Systems, Inc., Honeywell Aerospace, Houston Methodist Clear Lake Hospital, JES Tech, KBR, L3Harris Technologies, Leidos, Lockheed Martin, Mission Ops, MORI Associates, MRI Technologies, Nexus Solutions, Northrop Grumman, Oceaneering Space Systems, Odyssey Space Research LLC., OMEGA, PCI Productions LLC, Rothe, SAIC, Space Center Houston, SpaceX, Texas A&M Aerospace Human Systems Laboratory, TTEch North America, Inc., Voyager Technologies.

Visit <http://www.rnasa.org/photos.html> for images from the event.

The Rotary National Award for Space Achievement (RNASA) Foundation’s black-tie Gala on April 24, 2026, was recorded live, in its entirety, by Space City Films and is accessible on the website’s agenda page, www.rnasa.org/agenda.html.