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**ASTC honors excellence in science centers and museums with presentation of  
2022 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards**

*Ten institutions and one individual recognized for inspiring the field*

WASHINGTON, D.C., USA – The **Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC)**, the membership association for science centers and museums and other allied organizations that support engaging the public in science and technology, has named the recipients of its 2022 **Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards**. The Leading Edge Awards are presented to ASTC members and their teams in recognition of extraordinary accomplishments that enhance the performance of their organizations while also significantly advancing and inspiring the entire field. The 2022 awards honor some of the most innovative and impactful work of ASTC-member organizations over the past three years.

Awards were presented in five categories to a total of ten organizations and one individual associated with another.

“We are glad to be able to honor some of the amazing work that the global science center community has accomplished over the last few years,” said Christofer Nelson, President and CEO of ASTC. “Especially during a time when our members have been challenged by the pandemic and its continuing impact, it is inspiring to see examples of how these institutions have continued to innovate and lead with their communities to advance our shared vision of increasing understanding and engagement with science and technology among all people.”

**Awards for Community Service**

The Community Service category recognizes outstanding accomplishments in addressing the needs of the member’s community. The focus of this award is on service to the community beyond the STEM engagement mission central to the organization. Three organizations are honored this year:



- The **Discovery Center of Springfield**, Missouri, stepped in to provide high quality care and education for the families of healthcare workers on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic. The team began 2020 focused on helping their community members learn about health and safety through special exhibits. As they prepared to close their doors due to the pandemic, the center reached out to their local health department to discuss how they could best serve the community. The response was to ask the science center to stay open to provide care and meals to the children of healthcare workers once schools closed, ultimately providing over 250,000 hours of free childcare. They reached farther into the community, providing meals on weekends to families facing food insecurity and developing partnerships with local organizations to meet the needs of the kids in the science center’s care. The team also built a robust online learning program and STEM kits. And that was just the beginning—they’ve continued to create educational opportunities for the families in their community, including a STEM-based preschool opened in 2021.



- **TELUS Spark Science Centre** in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, radically changing its relationship to the Indigenous people on whose lands the center is built. The center is focusing on forging deep relationships with Indigenous communities and celebrating multiple ways of knowing in order to be more relevant to the communities the science center serves. They have created a full-time position focused on Indigenous engagement and have flipped the Spark’s engagement model so that Indigenous programming is Indigenous led. The science center is prioritizing these relationships, investing in partnerships with artists, filmmakers, and scientists in the community. The team has also adapted their administrative and training processes to reflect the value that these relationships hold. Among the new programs developed are a weeklong annual program called Indigenous Science Days, held during the week of the spring solstice, and a three-day camping intensive.
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- **Copernicus Science Centre** in Warsaw, Poland, and its staff steadfastly worked to support Ukrainians who escaped to Poland following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The science center became a place of refuge—where those fleeing unimaginable violence could find solace and moments of joy in the universal language of science. Copernicus Science Centre opened their planetarium and exhibits for free to refugees. The staff created Ukrainian-language activities for refugee children and provided safe spaces at the science center. They didn’t stop there: the team hit the road and took traveling exhibitions to temporary accommodation centers for refugees. And their work continues as they have developed a nationwide program to reach even more people and to bring so many together in the joy and peace of learning.
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## Awards for Resilience

The Resilience category recognizes organizations that have overcome a significant challenge with a focus on how the institution approached hardship to achieve new life, mission, and potential. Three awards were presented this year:

- The **Emerald Coast Science Center** in Fort Walton Beach, Florida found strength in its community at a time when it needed it most. When the science center closed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it went into dire financial straits. The team undertook a campaign to save the science center—even getting the local newspaper to run an article—and the community responded, sending support to their local science center. The Emerald Coast team was amazed at the donations that came from the community, including individuals, businesses, and more, that helped them find the resilience to create new outdoor exhibits that could provide a place for community members to visit and learn during the pandemic. They also found new partners along the way and ended up reporting that the 2021–2022 fiscal year was their best ever.
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- The **Museum of Discovery** in Little Rock, Arkansas, experienced a devastating flood in February 2021 when the boiler on the roof broke. Thousands of gallons of water destroyed two floors of offices and two of the museum’s largest galleries. The museum’s team found an opportunity in this disaster, however, and focused on rebuilding and reopening with a facility that was even more responsive to community needs. As soon as news of the flooding got around, the museum received offers of help from their community. Ultimately, the museum was closed for 27 weeks for repairs and rebuilding. The team made upgrades during the construction process that directly
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responded to their community—including new exhibits, like one focused on the STEM skills used in the renovation; a renewed animal facility that gives the public more opportunities to observe and appreciate the animals in the museum’s care; and more opportunities for neurodiverse community members.

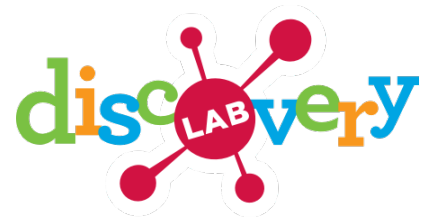
- The **New York Hall of Science** in Corona, New York, experienced multiple challenges. Following 16 months of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the science center reopened in July 2021 only to have their resilience tested again just two months later when flooding caused by Hurricane Ida resulted in devastating damage, including to parts of the building that had just been updated and refreshed. Faced with this disaster, the science center team found strength in their community, their supporters, local elected officials, and within themselves. Despite the doors being closed, they committed to delivering their educational programs online, in schools, at colleague institutions—everywhere they could reach. In the process, they learned how to thrive in the face of adversity.



### Awards for Visitor Experience

The Visitor Experience category recognizes outstanding accomplishments in visitor experience, which includes—but is not limited to—exhibitions, education programs, technology applications, theater and film programming, visitor services, research, and evaluation. Two awards were presented this year:

- **Discovery Lab** in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is honored for its deep partnership with Tulsa Public Schools, leading to the museum housing the school system’s official STEAM Center, providing classroom space, educators, and curriculum to every student in pre-K through fifth grade each year. The STEAM Center was being developed at the same time that Discovery Lab was planning its new 57,000 square foot building. Rather than two separate facilities, what if the STEAM Center was a part of the new Discovery Lab building? That would enable the students to engage in activities that might be too messy, too expensive, or too risky to do in a normal school classroom. With help from an architecture firm that was working with both parties, they worked through all the challenges. In just its first four months of operation, the STEAM Center has served nearly 7,000 students, each of whom participated in a lab activity led by a Discovery Lab educator and the opportunity to follow their own curiosity through the exhibits.



- The **Exploratorium** in San Francisco, California, is honored The Striving for Trans-Inclusion and Anti-Racism in Science learning—or STARS—program, which is intended to expand inclusion, belonging, and relevance in informal science learning with a focus on addressing inequities based on gender, sexuality, and race. STARS builds on existing Exploratorium activities in a way that centers excluded identities in STEAM and education, including trans and queer people and people from historically excluded racial backgrounds. The STARS cohort works with other Exploratorium teams to produce educational content for visitors focused on inclusion and access and to train facilitators to engage with visitors online and in-person. This past year, the STARS program worked to incorporate principles of anti-racism and gender inclusion as the Exploratorium restarted its school field trip program. And they’re prototyping efforts to offer free field trips as part of building long-term relationships with selected schools.



## Award for Business Practice

The Business Practice category recognizes outstanding accomplishments in the administration and financial sustainability of ASTC-member organizations. This includes—but is not limited to—revenue generation, marketing, public relations, fundraising, human resources, operations, and partnerships.

- This year’s honoree is the **Museum of the Future** in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for its attention to recruiting, training, and rewarding an exceptional staff. As a new institution, the museum was able to incorporate a new approach from the beginning and help define best practices for the region. On the recruiting side, the museum made interviews globally accessible and masked certain attributes to focus on skill-based assessment. Then the museum established an extensive, five-day collaborative training process for all guest-facing staff, which emphasized cultural understanding and cross-cultural learning. The museum, which depends on 100% paid fulltime staff, also offers a generous set of benefits, including annual airfare home to its largely international staff. The museum has also committed to ongoing staff development and engagement that are designed to be broadly inclusive, to foster personal and cultural connections among the diverse staff, and to reinforce museum values.



## Award for Individual Leadership

The Individual Leadership category recognizes extraordinary accomplishments in a leadership role for the individual’s organization and/or the field as a whole. This includes—but is not limited to—leadership in developing and applying new ideas and/or enhancing best practices. The award recognizes leadership, regardless of professional position or supervisory status.

The Awards Committee found it impossible to select a chief executive officer or staff member at an ASTC-member organization—the traditional recipients of this award—given the leadership shown by so many these past few years. But there was one nominee who really stood out.

- The 2022 recipient is **Peg Filliez**, a “superlative” volunteer at the **University of Nebraska State Museum** in Lincoln. As a skilled administrator before retiring from elsewhere at the university, Peg brought those insights to her volunteer work, helping document, rewrite, and streamline processes in several departments. She not only provided the extra bandwidth to overhaul the membership process, document educational practices, restructure the science kit program, and ensure compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, but also developed training for the new processes that continues to facilitate their implementation. In short, Peg was part of the essential glue that allowed the museum to weather the challenges of the pandemic and its reduced staffing and constrained budget.



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA  
**STATE MUSEUM**  
Morrill Hall

## Special Recognition in Community Service and Resilience

Finally, due to the extraordinary circumstances in Ukraine and the incredible resilience of the Ukrainian people, ASTC presented a special award to the Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine for their resilience and continued service to their community.

- The **Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine** operates the Science Museum of Kyiv and, just before the Russian invasion, the team was in the planning stages to open a new museum in Mariupol, Ukraine. Tragically, most of Mariupol been destroyed, including the historic building that was to house the new museum, and, even more sadly, at least one of team members involved in planning the museum’s opening lost his life in the bombing. This is one of the troubling stories of loss, displacement, and upheaval that the team at the Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine are facing. And yet, even when challenged by unimaginable tragedy, this team has worked to continue providing opportunities for STEM learning and engagement to the people of Ukraine. The team has been able to leverage the online programming that they offered during the pandemic to continue to reach the millions of displaced Ukrainian youth and families living in temporary homes in their country and throughout Europe. With so many Ukrainians having moved from their homes to stay with family members and in temporary housing in the western part of the country, the Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine is setting up pop-up exhibits and experiences throughout the region.



The selection of Leading Edge Award recipients was led by the [ASTC Awards Committee](#). Nominations for the 2023 awards will open in Spring 2023.

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### **About ASTC**

Founded in 1973, ASTC is a network of more than 600 science and technology centers and museums, and allied organizations, engaging more than 110 million people annually across North America and in almost 50 countries. With its members and partners, ASTC works towards a vision of increasing understanding of and engagement with science and technology among all people. [www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org)

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