



## Six Honored with Leading Edge Awards at 2009 Annual Conference

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### CONTACT:

Sean Smith  
Director, Government and Public Relations  
202/783-7200 x 113/[ssmith@astc.org](mailto:ssmith@astc.org)

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Four ASTC-member organizations and two science center professionals were honored with *Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards* at the 2009 ASTC Annual Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. Now in their fifth year, the awards recognize both small and large ASTC members and/or their employees for extraordinary accomplishments in Visitor Experience, Business Practice, and Leadership in the Field during the past three years. The awards, presented annually at the conference banquet, honor the late Roy L. Shafer, a former science center director, ASTC president, and organizational coach. Winners receive an etched glass award and a paid registration to the following year's ASTC Annual Conference (the 2010 conference will be hosted by the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, HI, October 2–5).

The Leading Edge Award for Business Practice was presented to **Sciencenter**, Ithaca, New York, for its *Sustainability Initiative*, which made several positive impacts on the center's operations. In addition to converting to 100% sustainable wind power, composting food waste, and installing environmentally-friendly restroom hand driers, Sciencenter also contributed to a wide range of community-building efforts, from increasing the accessibility of the center's exhibits and programs to all socioeconomic groups to creating a new salary-health-retirement package for sustaining science center staff. The jury also praised the center's willingness to share the initiative's framework with other institutions.

The recipient of the Leading Edge Award for Visitor Experience (Small Institution) was the **Bakken Museum**, Minneapolis, Minnesota, for its *Science Assets-Based School Partnership Program*. The program supports elementary students and their teachers by bolstering science assets—defined by the museum as the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that form the foundation for continued achievement in science. The Bakken staff use an inquiry-based approach to expand students' scientific reasoning skills; at the same time, the museum provides professional development to teachers, building their confidence to answer questions about science. A partnership between the museum and the Minneapolis Public Schools, the program is expanding to serve 2,700 district fourth graders and their teachers.

The award jury decided to give two Visitor Experience awards in the Large Institution category, one for an innovative online community and one for an exhibition. **Carnegie Science Center**, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, won for *BrainCake.org*, where 11- to 17-year-olds can access scholarship and science information, receive homework help, ask mentors for advice, and blog about science, all in a safe place. With a growing global database of over 9,000 members, the web site also counts more than 1 million hits each month and nearly 30,000 individual visitors monthly. *BrainCake.org* is one of the four core programs of the center's Girls, Math & Science Partnership, dedicated to engaging, educating, and embracing girls as architects of change.

The **Norsk Teknisk** Museum, in Oslo, Norway, won its Visitor Experience award for *Klima X*, a global climate change exhibition that breaks new ground for immersive environments. Visitors are required to put on rubber boots before entering the exhibition, where the entire floor is covered with four inches of water. The flooded floor, huge blocks of melting ice, sheets of rain, and smoking chimneys create an unforgettable visitor experience and reinforce the educational framework and

associated programming for the exhibition.

The jury also bestowed two Leading Edge Awards for Experienced Leadership in the Field. The first recipient was **Dr. Christopher Andrews**, director of the Steinhart Aquarium and chief of public programs, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. Andrews was the guiding force in developing the visitor experience—including the aquarium, natural history museum, planetarium, and all educational and public programming—for the new California Academy of Sciences, which reopened in September 2008 and has hosted more than two million visitors since opening day. The jury also noted his ability to inspire and nurture creative thinking across academy departments.

**Rachel Meyer**, executive director of the Coyote Point Museum for Environmental Education in San Mateo, California, was the second recipient. Meyer led a top-to-bottom revitalization of a museum on the brink of extinction. Not only did she revamp the museum's educational philosophy and transform the visitor experience, Meyer also set the museum on stronger financial footing. Due to her leadership, attendance is up 15% in the last year, membership has increased by 10%, and the museum has had balanced operating budgets for the last two fiscal years, after seven years of significant deficits.

Guidelines and nomination forms for the 2010 Leading Edge Awards competition are available online ([www.astc.org/about/awards/leading\\_edge.htm](http://www.astc.org/about/awards/leading_edge.htm)). The application deadline is April 6, 2010.

### **About ASTC**

The Association of Science-Technology Centers is an organization dedicated to furthering public engagement with science among increasingly diverse audiences. ASTC encourages excellence and innovation in informal science learning by serving and linking its members worldwide and advancing their common goals. Through strategic alliances and global partnerships, ASTC also supports science centers and museums in proactively addressing critical societal issues, locally and globally, where understanding of and engagement with science are essential. Founded in 1973, ASTC now numbers nearly 600 members in 45 countries. Members include not only science centers and museums, but also nature centers, aquariums, planetariums, zoos, botanical gardens, and natural history and children's museums, as well as companies, consultants, and other organizations that share an interest in informal science education. Visit [www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org) to learn more about ASTC and to find a science center near you.

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