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ASTC Announces 2019 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Award Recipients

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 16, 2019—The Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), the professional association for science centers and museums, will honor five of its member organizations and two ASTC-member professionals during the 2019 ASTC Annual Conference in Toronto, September 21–24.

Now in their 15th year, the Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards are presented annually by ASTC to recognize extraordinary accomplishments in business practice, visitor experience, and leadership in science centers and museums around the globe. Sponsored by Group Delphi, the “Edgie” awards honor the late Roy L. Shafer, a former science center director, ASTC president, organizational coach, and mentor to many institutions and people in the science center and museum field. A 14-member jury of science center and museum professionals reviewed and selected this year’s recipients.

A new award category for 2019, the Overcomer, celebrates an ASTC-member science center or museum that has successfully surmounted a significant and specific challenge. The first **Leading Edge Overcomer Award** goes to the **American Museum of Science & Energy** in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which needed to move from its beloved but aging, 54,000-square-foot facility into a new, 18,000-square-foot space, with state-of-the-art new exhibits. To engage its community in the move, the museum developed extensive new collaborations and partnerships that melded a science-rich local history, civic pride, culture, and enthusiasm for STEM engagement into something uniquely Oak Ridge. Scientists from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management, the Y-12 National Security Complex, community leaders, museum professionals, and volunteers were enlisted to help design the new, smaller space. Together, the community created five new, locally flavored science exhibitions with global significance—and a home for the most popular and engaging interactive stations from the old building. Working with the local scientific, historical, cultural, tourism, and community organizations, the museum co-created new festivals, spaces for community groups to exhibit their works every three months, and events featuring scientists with connections to the community. This new approach has launched the museum on a new course to becoming a hub in a “hub and spoke” heritage and science tourism ecosystem that includes other important science and history sites in the region and toward being a premiere destination the community takes pride in.

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The **Leading Edge Award for Business Practice** (small institution) is bestowed on the **Mid-Hudson Children's Museum** in Poughkeepsie, New York, for the Poughkeepsie Waterfront Market, which was conceived to make fresh, locally sourced food accessible to city residents and families; ensure affordability of food options; and educate the public on nutrition and meal preparation using food available at the market. The project grew from institutional shifts toward deepening community impact and engagement, and into listening to constituents. Creating the market has had positive, tangible benefits for the museum in community partnerships and collaboration, audience development, marketing and public relations, staff professional development, and fundraising.

Ciência Viva – National Agency for Scientific and Technological Culture in Lisbon, Portugal, receives the **Leading Edge Award for Business Practice** (large institution) for its Ciência Viva Journeys knowledge-based tourism initiative. Delivered and co-managed by a network of 21 science centers throughout Portugal, the program sells visitors a discovery package that includes a card, a guidebook, and a bilingual app (Portuguese and English) that offers more than 18 journeys, 54 travel itineraries, and more than 200 suggestions of locations to explore. In addition to free access to each of the science centers, Ciência Viva Journeys offers discounts and other benefits in hundreds of culture and science-related venues, places of accommodation, food, and tourist activities. The business model is supported by relationships with major travel partners, including the national railroad, an airline company, the fuel sector, and two national hotel chains.

The **spectrUM Discovery Area** in Missoula, Montana, wins the **Leading Edge Award for Visitor Experience** (small institution), for its role in co-developing and anchoring EmPower Place, a free family learning center embedded in the Missoula Food Bank & Community Center. Intended to feed both bodies and minds, the space is one part science center, one part library, and one part meal site. By operating inside a food bank, EmPower Place lowers barriers to entry and meets children and families where they already gather. The science center contributes with inclusive science programs and exhibits, welcoming thousands who have never been to its main location, sparking interest in science, and making shopping at the food bank a better experience for families.

The **Leading Edge Award for Visitor Experience** (large institution) goes to the **The Tech Interactive** in San Jose, California, honoring its BioTinkering Lab. This novel space explores the intersection of biology, design, technology, and making, with programs that empower everyone to experiment, create, and problem-solve with living systems. Visitors can create objects from sawmill waste using the power of fungal mycelium, extract pigments from bacteria and use their paints for artistic expression, and grow biomaterials and create something wonderful to take home. More than 60% of visitors say the programs are extremely fun and interesting—and the appeal is equal across genders, with strong and consistent self-reported increases in interest in science, and girls showing the largest increase.

The **Leading Edge Award for Leadership in the Field** (non-CEO) is given this year to **Paul Martin**, Codirector of the Center for Innovation in Informal STEM Learning at Arizona State University's School for the Future of Innovation in Society in Tempe. His exemplary leadership during the past three years has helped reinvigorate and expand the impact of the long-running National Informal STEM Education Network (NISE Network) through his role as Principal Investigator of the new Space and Earth Informal STEM Education (SEISE) project. SEISE leverages and expands the NISE Network to include many new participants and viability for another decade, ensuring its continued impact on the missions and activities of hundreds of ASTC-member organizations and their local community and scientific collaborators.

Maribel Ibarra Lopez, Chief Executive Officer of Sietecolores Ideas Interactivas, a museum development and exhibition design firm based in Mexico City, receives the **Leading Edge Award for Leadership in the Field** (CEO). For more than 20 years, she has created innovative, interactive spaces that bring science and culture to different corners of Mexico and, in the past few years, also to the world beyond. Through strategic partnerships forged on three continents during the last three years, she has led the development of nearly 500,000 square feet of new exhibitions, which have welcomed more than 1 million visitors. In addition to science centers and children's museums, she has also introduced interactive spaces and experiences to places that have not traditionally had them, including natural history museums, historic sites, and art museums. Throughout her career, she has contributed to the professional development of more than 100 specialists in art of interactivity, including designers, engineers, content developers, architects, project managers, educators, and fabricators, and started a mentoring program where members of the Sietecolores team become mentors for others, so they can develop specific skills for improving their performance and furthering their professional development and the advancement of the field.

Serving on this year's jury were Jonah Cohen (the jury's chair), from McWane Science Center in Birmingham, Alabama; Adrienne Barnett from Thinkery in Austin, Texas; Toph Bryant from Kentucky Science Center in Louisville; Irena Cieślińska from Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw, Poland; Megan Ramer from Connecticut Science Center in Hartford; Andrea Durham from Science World in Vancouver, Canada; Pody Gay from Museum of Discovery in Little Rock, Arkansas; Eric Godoy from Denver Museum of Nature & Science in Colorado; Ali Jackson from Sciencenter in Ithaca, New York; Clara Chien Hui Lim from Science Centre Singapore; Jeff Rosenblatt from Science City at Union Station in Kansas City, Missouri; Meghan Schiedel from Terry Lee Wells Nevada Discovery Museum in Reno; Janella Watson from Providence Children's Museum in Rhode Island; and Tifferney White from Discovery Place in Charlotte, North Carolina.

ASTC thanks the jury for their service and Group Delphi for sponsoring the award. Nominations for 2020 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards will be accepted in Spring 2020.

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About ASTC

Founded in 1973, ASTC supports science and technology centers and museums to thrive—now and in the future—as they engage their communities in science and technology. It now represents nearly 700 organizational members that welcome more than 120 million people each year in more than 50 countries around the world. ASTC champions public engagement with science, together with its members sets course for new frontiers, and facilitates connections among its member organizations and the professionals who work in them.

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