ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Challenger Center
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</table>
Dear Friends,

Thanks to your support, 2017 was an outstanding year! Our Challenger Learning Centers flew thousands of students to the Moon and Mars, and we took major steps toward the launch of Classroom Adventures, our classroom-based programs. All this work is for one goal – to inspire more students!

A true highlight of the year was receiving the National Science Board’s Public Service Award. This award is presented to individuals or organizations for exemplary service in promoting public understanding of science and engineering. For the past 32 years, our STEM education programs have reached more than 5 million students, and it is a true honor to be recognized for our efforts. We share this award with each of you, because without you, none of this would be possible. THANK YOU!

The work we do today, tomorrow, and in the coming years will impact the future of this country. Employers from all industries continue to tell us what they need: STEM-educated talent who can problem solve, communicate, and work in teams. That need is projected to increase over the next 30 years. This is why we are working hard to reach more students … why we continue to open Challenger Learning Centers … why we are committed to enhancing our out-of-this-world Center Missions … and why the development of Classroom Adventures is so critical.

A special thanks to each of you – our partners and supporters – for being a part of our work to inspire the next generation of innovators. We are excited for the future and the opportunity to give more students the chance to take part in our Challenger Center experiences. Today, we reach 250,000+ students each year – a number that makes us proud. But it’s not enough. We want millions! Together, we will reach that goal and spark a passion for learning in a new generation of students.

Thank you for joining us on this incredible mission!
Challenger Center STEM education experiences continue to inspire hundreds of thousands of students worldwide. With more than 40 Challenger Learning Centers offering our space-themed Center Missions, and the development of our new Classroom Adventures, we remain strongly committed and determined to ignite the potential in more students around the globe!

In 2017, Expedition Mars, the newest Center Mission, debuted at eight additional Challenger Learning Centers, and the feedback from the students is already out of this world!

We also completed the pilot of our first Classroom Adventure, Aquatic Investigators. We are now using the input and suggestions from the teachers and students involved in that pilot to evolve the program. Plans continue to move forward to create a full suite of Classroom Adventures for 3rd to 5th grade classrooms.

While many students begin to lose interest in STEM subjects as early as middle school, Challenger Center programs keep students engaged, pique their interest in STEM subjects, and help create a generation of lifelong learners.
**CENTER MISSIONS**

18,969 students have already experienced Expedition Mars, our newest space-themed Center Mission

91% of students surveyed indicated they would recommend a Challenger Learning Center to a friend after flying Expedition Mars

82% of students surveyed said Expedition Mars increased their interest in learning more about STEM

---

**CLASSROOM ADVENTURES**

1,580 students took part in the pilot of Aquatic Investigators, our first Classroom Adventure

4.7 out of 5 is how teachers rated student engagement in Aquatic Investigators (5 being very engaged)

87% of teachers who participated in the pilot of Aquatic Investigators said they would use the program in their classrooms in the future
Martians of Tomorrow, a campaign to raise awareness about the importance of STEM education and inspiring the next generation, launched by asking parents, teachers, community members, education leaders, organizations, and professionals alike to take a pledge to support students on their journey to become future STEM leaders.

In addition to pledging a commitment to inspiring the next generation, the Martians of Tomorrow campaign provides free educational resources and activities. Visitors to the website can also take a Martian quiz to find out what role they would play as #MartiansOfTomorrow. Each Martian role – communications, navigation, biology, robotics, geology, life support, medical, rover, and weather – correlates to a team in Challenger Center’s newest space-themed mission, Expedition Mars.

Join the 1,500+ people who have taken the pledge!
Visit challenger.org/martians and take the pledge today!

Challenger Center celebrated the grand opening of the Challenger Learning Center of Lockport (NY). The ribbon-cutting ceremony included President and CEO Lance Bush, New York State Senator Robert Ortt, Lockport Mayor Anne E. McCaffrey, and the Challenger Learning Center of Lockport team.
Challenger Center hosted a STEM education panel – Inspiring the Martians of Tomorrow – at the annual Humans to Mars Summit in Washington, D.C. The Summit is a comprehensive Mars exploration conference that addresses the major technical, scientific, and policy challenges of getting humans to Mars. President and CEO Lance Bush moderated a panel discussion about what is happening and what needs to happen to prepare today’s students to become the professionals responsible for setting foot on Mars.

During the Summit, students from E.L. Haynes Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. took part in a new Classroom Adventure, Earth to Mars. The students were challenged with a simulated Space Launch System rocket launch and an engineering design challenge, where they had to create the first Mars habitat using 3D printing pens and drawing programs. Earth to Mars, like all Challenger Center programs, puts STEM concepts in the context of a real-world challenge, while also enabling the students to practice communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.
Challenger Center recognized Jacqueline Caudill, a middle school teacher in Viper, KY, as the 2017 June Scobee Rodgers Innovative Educator Award recipient. Named in honor of Challenger Center’s founding chair, the award recognizes an outstanding educator who understands the importance of STEM education and demonstrates a passion for teaching STEM subjects.

Caudill, nominated by Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky in Hazard, has been a classroom teacher for 28 years and currently teaches sixth to eighth grade reading/ELA. Among her many accomplishments, Caudill worked with Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky to start an award-winning FIRST LEGO league team at her school. She also led a mentoring program that connects eighth-grade students with community members in STEM careers.

Caudill received the recognition and a $2,500 award during a presentation at Viper Elementary School. Cris Petro, a fourth-grade teacher from Bailly Elementary in Chesterton, IN, was named the 2017 runner-up and was presented with a $1,000 award. Petro was nominated by Challenger Learning Center of Northwest Indiana.

The 2017 Arthur C. Clarke Award for Innovation in Education presented to Challenger Learning Center–St. Louis

The 2017 Arthur C. Clarke Award for Innovation in Education was presented to Challenger Learning Center-St. Louis. The award recognizes a Challenger Learning Center that has implemented a new, innovative program or project that impacts student learning, supports teachers and/or promotes creativity. The Center was recognized for the design and distribution of Challenger Learning Center Maker Kits and was honored at our annual conference by Dr. Joseph N. Pelton, the sponsor of the award.

Tasmyn Front, Executive Director,
Challenger Learning Center-St. Louis,
with Dr. Joseph N. Pelton
The summer of 2017 included one of the most anticipated events of the year – the total solar eclipse. The blue skies darkened, the temperature dropped, and the bright sun turned into a silver ring as the Moon passed through its path. Our three Kentucky-based Challenger Learning Centers hosted official NASA eclipse-viewing events because of their proximity to the path of totality. Other Challenger Learning Centers across the country hosted events and viewing parties to celebrate the August 21, 2017 total solar eclipse.

The team from Challenger Learning Center at Paducah (KY) watching the eclipse with Astronaut Terry Wilcutt.

Ahhhhhhhh!
ALASKA
Challenger Learning Center of Alaska
9711 Kenai Spur Hwy.
Kenai, AK 99611-7804
(907) 283-2000
www.akchallenger.org
Opened: April 2000

ARIZONA
Challenger Space Center of Arizona
9617 N. Metro Parkway W.
Suite 2214
Phoenix, AZ 85051
(623) 322-2001
www.azchallenger.org
Opened: June 2000

CALIFORNIA
Challenger Learning Center at the Columbia Memorial Space Center
12400 Columbia Way
Downey, CA 90242
(562) 231-1200
www.columbiaspacescience.org
Opened: October 2009

Challenger Learning Center at Chabot Space & Science Center
10000 Skyline Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94619-2444
(510) 336-7373
www.chabotspace.org
Opened: June 2000

Challenger Learning Center at the Powerhouse Science Center Discovery Campus
3615 Auburn Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95821-2007
(916) 808-3942
www.sacramentoclc.com
Opened: October 1997

COLORADO
Challenger Learning Center of Colorado
10215 Lexington Dr.
Colorado Springs, CO 80920
(719) 598-9755
www.ChallengerColorado.org
Opened: September 2002

CONNECTICUT
Challenger Learning Center at the Discovery Museum
4450 Park Ave.
Bridgeport, CT 06604-1015
(203) 372-3521
www.discoverymuseum.org/challenger-lc
Opened: April 1991

FLORIDA
Challenger Learning Center at Kirby Smith Middle School
2034 Hubbard St.
Jacksonville, FL 32206-3798
(904) 630-6601
www.duvalschools.org/kirbysmith
Opened: September 1996

Challenger Learning Center of Tallahassee
200 S. Duval St.
Tallahassee, FL 32301-1738
(850) 645-7827
www.challengerth.com
Opened: March 2003

GEORGIA
Challenger Learning Center at the Coca-Cola Space Science Center
701 Front Ave.
Columbus, GA 31901-2925
(706) 649-1470
www.ccssc.org
Opened: June 1996

HAWAII
Challenger Center Hawaii at Barbers Point Elementary School
3001 Boxer Rd.
Kapolei, HI 96707-2103
(808) 673-7410
www.challengercenterhawaii.com
Opened: April 1993

ILLINOIS
Challenger Learning Center at Heartland Community College
1500 West Raab Rd.
Normal, IL 61761
(309) 268-8700
www.heartland.edu/clc
Opened: December 2003

Challenger Learning Center for Science & Technology of Aurora University
222 Church St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
(815) 338-7722
www.challengerillinois.org
Opened: July 2001

INDIANA
Challenger Learning Center of Northwest Indiana
2301 173rd St.
Hammond, IN 46323-2094
(219) 989-3250
www.clcwni.com
Opened: February 1999

KENTUCKY
Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky
One Community College Dr.
Hazard, KY 41701-2403
(606) 487-3049
www.clcky.com
Opened: March 1999

Challenger Learning Center - Louisville
4001 Herman St.
Louisville, KY 40212
(502) 485-7630
https://kysciencecenter.org/programs/challenger-learning-center/
Opened: January 2011

Challenger Learning Center at Paducah
4810 Alben Barkley Dr.
Paducah, KY 42002-7380
(270) 534-3101
www.clcpaducah.org
Opened: August 2002

MAINE
Challenger Learning Center of Maine
30 Venture Way
Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 990-2900
www.astronaut.org
Opened: March 2004

MARYLAND
Challenger Learning Center at Howard B. Owens Science Center
9601 Greenbelt Rd.
Lanham, MD 20706-3397
(301) 918-8750
www.pgcps.org/howardbowens
Opened: July 1989

MASSACHUSETTS
Challenger Learning Center at the Christa Corrigan McAuliffe Center, Framingham State University
100 State St.
Framingham, MA 01701-9101
(508) 626-4050
www.christa.org
Opened: October 1994

MISSOURI
Challenger Learning Center – St. Louis
205 Brotherton Ln.
St. Louis, MO 63135
(314) 521-6205
www.challengerstl.org
Opened: November 2003

NEVADA
Challenger Learning Center of Northern Nevada
10 S. Lake St.
Reno, NV 89501
(775) 830-5295
www.nevadachallenger.org
Opened: October 2014

NEW JERSEY
Buehler Challenger & Science Center
400 Paramus Rd., Lot C
Paramus, NJ 07652
(201) 251-8589
www.bcsc.org
Opened: October 1994
### NEW MEXICO

| Challenger Learning Center of Las Cruces | 505 S. Main St., Suite 401  
| Las Cruces, NM 88001  
| (575) 527-9300  
| [http://lcps.k12.nm.us](http://lcps.k12.nm.us)  
| Opened: September 2015 |  

### NEW YORK

| Challenger Learning Center of the Twin Tier Region | 182 E. Union St., Suite 2  
| Allegany, NY 14760-1328  
| (716) 379-8686  
| [www.drclc.org](http://www.drclc.org)  
| Opened: June 2009 |  

| Challenger Learning Center of Lockport | 160 Washburn St.  
| Lockport, NY 14094  
| (716) 434-3196  
| [www.clclockport.org](http://www.clclockport.org)  
| Opened: February 1992 |  

### OHIO

| Challenger Learning Center of Dayton | 1401 Leo St.  
| Dayton, OH 45404-1700  
| (937) 542-6143  
| [https://www.dps.k12.oh.us/our-departments/challenger-center/](https://www.dps.k12.oh.us/our-departments/challenger-center/)  
| Opened: September 1990 |  

| Challenger Learning Center of Lake Erie West | 4955 Seaman Rd.  
| Oregon, OH 43616  
| (419) 245-6201  
| [www.esclakeeriewest.org/challenger-learning-center](http://www.esclakeeriewest.org/challenger-learning-center)  
| Opened: October 2003 |  

### SOUTH CAROLINA

| Challenger Learning Center of Greater Rochester | 657 East Ave.  
| Rochester, NY 14607-2101  
| (585) 473-7494  
| [www.monroe.edu/challenger](http://www.monroe.edu/challenger)  
| Opened: February 1992 |  

### SOUTH CAROLINA

| Challenger Learning Center of the Greater Capital Region at MiSci | 15 Nott Terrace Heights  
| Schenectady, NY 12308  
| (518) 382-7890  
| [www.misci.edu/educators-and-group/challenger-learning-center](http://www.misci.edu/educators-and-group/challenger-learning-center)  
| Opened: May 2015 |  

### TEXAS

| Challenger Learning Center at Texas State Technical College Harlingen | 1902 N. Loop 499  
| Harlingen, TX 78550  
| (563) 364-4464  
| [www.tstc.edu/challenger](http://www.tstc.edu/challenger)  
| Opened: November 2013 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the Scobee Education Center, San Antonio College | 1819 N. Main Ave.  
| San Antonio, TX 78212  
| (210) 486-0100  
| [www.saccsobee.education](http://www.saccsobee.education)  
| Opened: October 2014 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at Texas State Technical College Waco | 703 Airline Dr.  
| Waco, TX 76705  
| (254) 867-2015  
| [www.tstc.edu/challenger](http://www.tstc.edu/challenger)  
| Opened: September 2016 |  

### VIRGINIA

| Challenger Learning Center at the National Space Centre | Exploration Dr.  
| (Off Corporation Rd.)  
| Leicester, United Kingdom LE45NS  
| 011(44)1162582113  
| [http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions](http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions)  
| Opened: September 1999 |  

### WASHINGTON

| Challenger Learning Center at The Museum of Flight | 9404 E. Marginal Way South  
| Seattle, WA 98108-4097  
| (206) 764-5700  
| [www.museumofflight.org](http://www.museumofflight.org)  
| Opened: September 1999 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the Ontario Science Centre | 770 Don Mills Rd.  
| Toronto, Ontario Canada  
| M3C 1T3  
| (416) 696-3140  
| [https://www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/school/challenger-learning-centre/](https://www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/school/challenger-learning-centre/)  
| Opened: September 1992 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at Songam Space Center | 410-5 Seokhyunri, Jangheungmyeon, Yangju-Si  
| Gyeonggi-Do, Korea  
| (031) 894-6000  
| [www.songamspacecenter.com](http://www.songamspacecenter.com)  
| Opened: June 2007 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the MathScience Innovation Center | 2401 Hartman St.  
| Richmond, VA 23223-2458  
| (804) 343-6525  
| [www.MyMiSC.org](http://www.MyMiSC.org)  
| Opened: March 1991 |  

### WEST VIRGINIA

| Challenger Learning Center at Wheeling Jesuit University | 316 Washington Ave.  
| Wheeling, WV 26003-6295  
| (304) 243-8740  
| [http://clc.wju.edu](http://clc.wju.edu)  
| Opened: January 1995 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at Songam Space Center | 410-5 Seokhyunri, Jangheungmyeon, Yangju-Si  
| Gyeonggi-Do, Korea | (031) 894-6000 | [www.songamspacecenter.com](http://www.songamspacecenter.com) | Opened: June 2007 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the National Space Centre | Exploration Dr.  
| (Off Corporation Rd.)  
| Leicester, United Kingdom LE45NS  
| 011(44)1162582113  
| [http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions](http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions)  
| Opened: September 1999 |  

### INTERNATIONAL

| Challenger Learning Center at the Ontario Science Centre | 770 Don Mills Rd.  
| Toronto, Ontario Canada  
| M3C 1T3  
| (416) 696-3140  
| [https://www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/school/challenger-learning-centre/](https://www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/school/challenger-learning-centre/)  
| Opened: September 1992 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at Songam Space Center | 410-5 Seokhyunri, Jangheungmyeon, Yangju-Si  
| Gyeonggi-Do, Korea  
| (031) 894-6000  
| [www.songamspacecenter.com](http://www.songamspacecenter.com)  
| Opened: June 2007 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the MathScience Innovation Center | 2401 Hartman St.  
| Richmond, VA 23223-2458  
| (804) 343-6525  
| [www.MyMiSC.org](http://www.MyMiSC.org)  
| Opened: March 1991 |  

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| Seattle, WA 98108-4097  
| (206) 764-5700  
| [www.museumofflight.org](http://www.museumofflight.org)  
| Opened: September 1999 |  

| Challenger Learning Center at the National Space Centre | Exploration Dr.  
| (Off Corporation Rd.)  
| Leicester, United Kingdom LE45NS  
| 011(44)1162582113  
| [http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions](http://education.spacecentre.co.uk/space-missions)  
| Opened: September 1999 |
In 2017, Challenger Center’s revenue was $4.1 million. Eighty-three percent of our revenue went directly to the development and delivery of our impactful STEM-education programs around the world. This includes the establishment of a new Challenger Learning Center in Lockport, New York. We rolled out our newest mission, Expedition Mars, to eight Challenger Learning Centers. The mission is now offered at 18 Challenger Learning Centers nationwide and has served nearly 19,000 students. We also successfully piloted Aquatic Investigators and Earth to Mars, our first two Classroom Adventures. We are now looking to develop more classroom-based programs and intend to scale these programs to reach millions of students each year.

We are grateful to our government, corporate, and foundation partners, as well as all the individuals that contributed in 2017. These organizations and people support us in many ways, including monetary gifts and in-kind contributions of their expertise and resources. It is your support that enabled us to ignite the potential in 250,000+ students and will help us to ignite the potential in millions more in future years – thank you.

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**REVENUE SOURCES**

- Federal Grant Programs and Related Match Funding: 46%
- Science, Space, and Technology Education Trust Fund: 25%
- Affiliation Fees: 16%
- Corporate, Foundation, and Individual Giving: 11%
- Program Upgrades for Existing Challenger Learning Centers: 1%
- Investment and Other Revenue: 1%

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**EXPENSES**

- Education Programs: 83%
- Management and Administration: 10%
- Fundraising: 7%

**EDUCATION PROGRAM EXPENSES**

- Program Development and Network Support: 91%
- Communications: 7%
- Center Upgrades and New Centers: 2%

*When calculating the amount of Challenger Center income spent on management and administration, we exclude depreciation and write-offs of bad debt. Neither of those expenses reflect real expenditure of donated funds on management and administration costs. In fact, they demonstrate Challenger Center’s commitment to responsible fiscal management.*
# CHALLENGER CENTER FOR SPACE SCIENCE EDUCATION STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the year ended December 31, 2017

## REVENUE AND SUPPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>UNRESTRICTED</th>
<th>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science, Space, and Technology Education Trust Fund</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal grants and agreements</td>
<td>$1,825,190</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,825,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License fees</td>
<td>$652,480</td>
<td></td>
<td>$652,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions and sponsorships</td>
<td>$288,047</td>
<td>$59,834</td>
<td>$347,881</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-kind contributions</td>
<td>$105,359</td>
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<td>$105,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-federal grants</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product sales</td>
<td>$37,474</td>
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<td>$37,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>$26,533</td>
<td></td>
<td>$26,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrations</td>
<td>$20,495</td>
<td></td>
<td>$20,495</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>$3,267</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other revenue</td>
<td>$18,071</td>
<td></td>
<td>$18,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Released from restrictions</td>
<td>$138,191</td>
<td>$(138,191)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total revenue and support</strong></td>
<td>$4,155,107</td>
<td>$(78,357)</td>
<td>$4,076,750</td>
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</table>

## EXPENSES

**PROGRAM SERVICES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>UNRESTRICTED</th>
<th>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network support</td>
<td>$1,025,091</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,025,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal grants</td>
<td>$1,825,190</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,825,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>$247,210</td>
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<td>$247,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$243,144</td>
<td></td>
<td>$243,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation and contracts</td>
<td>$44,024</td>
<td></td>
<td>$44,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total program services</strong></td>
<td>$3,384,659</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,384,659</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**SUPPORTING SERVICES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>UNRESTRICTED</th>
<th>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and general</td>
<td>$637,349</td>
<td></td>
<td>$637,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>$277,694</td>
<td></td>
<td>$277,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total supporting services</strong></td>
<td>$915,043</td>
<td></td>
<td>$915,043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL EXPENSES**                         | $4,299,702   |                        | $4,299,702|

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS**                   | $(144,595)   | $(78,357)              | $(222,952)*|

**NET ASSETS, beginning of year**           | $535,208     | $140,728               | $675,936  |

**NET ASSETS, end of year**                  | $390,613     | $62,371                | $452,984  |

*The change in net assets reflects budgeted investments made to help the overall organization grow and thrive in years to come.*
The National Science Board (NSB) awarded Challenger Center with its 2017 Public Service Award. This esteemed award honors exemplary service in promoting public understanding of science and engineering.

Past award recipients include the American Museum of Natural History, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, PBS television series NOVA, the Expanding Your Horizons Network, and the Sea Education Association.

“The Challenger Center learning system is remarkable in its reach, having touched millions of students and teachers, pre-kindergarten through high school in the United States and abroad, since it opened its first center. The fact that their learning experiences remain current—changing and growing with trends and technological advancements—demonstrates their commitment to the mission and to those that they continue to serve. One student at a time, Challenger Center inspires the kind of curiosity that leads to further exploration and success in STEM fields.”
Name: France L. Jackson, Ph.D.
User Experience Researcher at Intel Corporation

Education: B.S. in Industrial Engineering, Clemson University; M.S. in Industrial Engineering, Clemson University; Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computing, University of Florida

Which of our Challenger Learning Centers did you visit?
Challenger Learning Center of Richland County School District One in Columbia, SC.

When did you visit a Challenger Learning Center?
With both my elementary and middle school classes. I also went in middle school for a week-long camp.

What do you remember most from your experience?
I remember how hands-on the experience was. I still mention some of the experiments we did in interviews today. I remember making rockets with film canisters, vinegar, and seltzer tablets. I especially loved the space mission. It was such a fun experience. I remember being extremely fascinated by all the moving parts and the puzzles we had to solve. I think, as an adult, I would still enjoy the space mission activity.

Have you always been interested in STEM?
I was always good at science and math, but I did not decide until around 6th grade that I wanted to be an engineer. As a child, I was very interested in how things work, building with LEGO® and taking things apart. Middle school is when I started to attend various STEM- nurturing activities such as science camp.

Did the visit to the Challenger Learning Center affect your decision to pursue a STEM degree or career?
Participating in camp at the Challenger Learning Center played a major role in my decision to be an engineer. I am not sure I would be an engineer if it were not for the hands-on experience I was able to engage in while at the Center. I definitely consider the Center and my experience there a major event in my life that I often look back on and considered for its profound impact.

Why is STEM education so critical at a young age?
I think exposure or the lack thereof is one of the major reasons we don’t see more people interested in STEM, particularly girls and minorities. People can’t aspire to be something they have never heard of or don’t know exists. We should expose kids to STEM early, often, and in many different forms. I also think it is important to expose kids to professionals in STEM careers early on.

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue STEM degrees or careers?
I would encourage students to stick with it! Search to see what kinds of STEM degrees and jobs are out there. If you see a job, work backwards. What kind of degree is required to get that job? Research the degree and see what schools offer that program. I would encourage them to look for STEM mentors. I would also advise them to find ways in their community to help nurture their interest, such as attending summer camps, weekend programs, or visiting STEM centers like the Challenger Learning Center. Finally, I encourage anyone interested in STEM to start to learn basic programming. Use one of the online course sites to teach yourself to program.

Why should people support Challenger Center’s STEM programs?
Challenger Center’s STEM programs offer the community a unique experience. I honestly can’t even find the words to describe how amazing that experience is. The equipment, the spacesuits, the puzzles, and problem-solving – everything about the Mission exercise is innovative and unique. Since my time at the Center, the programs and experiences offered have grown so much. The Center is such a gem and we should not only support it, but take pride in it. It’s an opportunity for kids to get hands-on experiences that can have a profound impact on their lives. If it were not for the Challenger Learning Center, I would not be Dr. Jackson with three STEM degrees and a job at Intel.

In one sentence, how would you describe your Challenger Learning Center experience?
My experience at the Challenger Learning Center was simply life changing.
Dear Donors,

I am Dr. France Jackson, a Challenger Center Alumna, and it is with sincere gratitude that I write this letter. Thank you for your support. During school field trips and summer camps at the Challenger Learning Center of Richland County School District One in Columbia, South Carolina, I was able to get invaluable hands-on experience with science and engineering projects. The Center was always one of my favorite places to go as a child because it was extremely fun and offered me an outlet to be myself and explore. The Center encouraged exploration and creativity, while sparking my interest in becoming a scientist and nurturing my inquisitive nature.

Since my time at the Challenger Learning Center, I have completed three engineering degrees. A Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Industrial Engineering, from Clemson University, and a Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computer making me one of the first African-American women to earn a Ph.D. from the Computer Information Systems and Engineering Department at the University of Florida. I completed four internships at the Intel Corporation and currently I work at Intel as a UX researcher and designer on a Customer Innovation Team. It is my job to use the exploration and creativity skills I learned at the Challenger Learning Center to find, create, and test innovative software experiences on Intel Architecture. My job is extremely rewarding and fun. It is a blessing to have a job you love and to be working in an area you are passionate about.

If it were not for the Challenger Learning Center, I would not be the person I am today. The hands-on activities and STEM exposure at such a young age are some of the top reasons why I became an engineer. I personally attribute much of my success to the impact the Center had on my life. Challenger Learning Center of Richland County School District One is in the middle of a low-income neighborhood where the majority of the residents are under-represented minorities.

If it were not for your generous support, Challenger Learning Centers and their innovative STEM programs would not exist or thrive.

The Centers create exposure for many kids who wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity to explore STEM in such a natural and fun way. I cannot reiterate enough how important and vital of an impact the Challenger Learning Center has had on me!

Again, thank you for your generous donations. Your gift is being used to train, engage, and inspire future leaders of tomorrow. When people like you give of your time, talent, and resources to invest in STEM, there is nothing we can’t achieve as a nation. America’s future looks bright because of you.

With a grateful heart,
France L. Jackson, Ph.D.
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