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News

11 April, 2019

SWOSU Physics Students Win Awards and Engage with Former NASA Flight Director



Southwestern Oklahoma State University physics students were recently honored with awards and heard remarks from former NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz (fifth from left) at the 2019 Physics Alumni and Awards Banquet held in Weatherford. Among those students winning awards were (from left): Daniel Gassen, El Reno; Emily Trail, Weatherford; Cameron Cinnamon, Garber; Jaxon Taylor, Mustang; Boubacar Wane, Bamako, Mali; Luke Kraft, Hooker; Brock Mason, Tuttle; and Raistlin Hiner, Anadarko.

Southwestern Oklahoma State University physics students were recently honored with awards and heard remarks from former NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz at the 2019 Physics Alumni and Awards Banquet held at the Stafford Air & Space Museum in Weatherford.

Kranz, author of *Failure Is Not An Option*, was flight director beginning in the Gemini missions through Apollo and beyond, retiring in 1994 after 37 years of federal service.

The annual banquet is held to honor students and present them with awards for their accomplishments. This year's honorees were:

- Boubacar Wane, Bamako, Mali senior, J.R. Pratt Outstanding Student in Physics, Graduating with Honors and Academic Recognition
- Jaxon Taylor, Mustang senior, Leadership Award and Graduating with Honors
- Luke Kraft, Hooker senior, Distinguished Service Award, Graduating with Honors and Academic Recognition
- Josue' Ruiz, Marlow senior, Academic Recognition
- Lyly Van, Broken Arrow senior, Academic Recognition
- Emily Trail, Weatherford junior, J.R. Pratt Scholarship
- Daniel Gassen, El Reno junior, Academic Recognition and J.R. Pratt Scholarship
- Cameron Cinnamon, Garber junior, J.R. Pratt Scholarship
- Hunter Floyd, Mountain View junior, Benny J. Hill Scholarship and Arts & Sciences Dean's Scholarship
- Brock Mason, Tuttle sophomore, Sigma Pi Sigma Honor Society, Outstanding Midclassman in Physics, Arthur McClelland Memorial Scholarship and Benny J. Hill Scholarship
- Tayler Valdez, Adams freshman, Benny J. Hill Scholarship
- Raistlin Hiner, Anadarko freshman, Garabed Armoudian Scholarship and Ray C Jones Scholarship

Following the student awards, physics alumni in attendance who studied under J.R. Pratt, the first chair of the Physics Department, were recognized. Many of the graduates had careers with NASA or one of its contractors and contributed to the successful space missions that put Americans on the moon before the end of the 1960's.

The evening culminated with a presentation by Kranz. As the leader of the "Tiger Team" of flight directors who brought the Apollo 13 spaceship safely back to Earth on April 17, 1970, Kranz demonstrated extraordinary courage and heroism. The hit film, *Apollo 13*, chronicles Kranz' struggle to devise the plan that would safely bring the ship and its crew of three astronauts home after its oxygen system failed. Actor Ed Harris portrays Kranz in the film, which was directed by Ron Howard.

Kranz is currently a consultant and speaker. "Failure is not an option," is the motto that carried him through the Apollo 13 crisis and is a major theme of his motivational message.

Kranz spoke to the audience of physics students and alumni on the Apollo 11 moon landing, providing an insider's view on what was happening in Mission Control during the harrowing landing as computers failed to update and the missing data needed to determine "Go/No Go." He also showed never-before-seen video of the controllers during this time, culminating with video of the planting of the first American flag on the Moon by astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

He was introduced by longtime NASA Engineer, SWOSU Physics Alumnus, and SWOSU Distinguished Alumnus James Bates, Class of 1962, who also played an important role in getting Kranz as speaker for the banquet.

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