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LIBERTY SCIENCE CENTER HOSTS 13TH ANNUAL GENIUS GALA MAY 21, HONORING THE INVENTOR OF GENE-EDITING TECHNOLOGY CRISPR, FOUNDER OF ALL-GIRL AFGHAN ROBOTICS TEAM, METEOROLOGIST CREDITED WITH WARNING OF LA WILDFIRES, AND ARTIST WHO WORKS IN PIXELS, BINARY-CODE & DIGITAL LIGHTS

JERSEY CITY, NJ, May 20, 2024 – On May 21, Liberty Science Center will host its highly anticipated 13th Annual Genius Gala, honoring four extraordinary visionaries whose groundbreaking work has reshaped science, technology, and society. The awardees are Jennifer Doudna, Roya Mahboob, Edgar McGregor, and Leo Villareal, who will be recognized for their pioneering achievements in gene editing, robotics education for Afghan girls, life-saving weather forecasting, and digital artistry.

Jennifer Doudna, a Berkeley biochemist and recipient of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, will receive the Center's highest honor, the Genius Award. She co-invented CRISPR, a revolutionary gene-editing technology that allows scientists to modify DNA with unprecedented precision. By adapting a natural immune defense mechanism found in bacteria, she and her collaborator Emmanuelle Charpentier unlocked a powerful tool that is transforming medicine, agriculture, and biotechnology, which has already led to breakthroughs in treating genetic diseases and holds the potential to eradicate certain hereditary disorders.

Roya Mahboob, the recipient of LSC's inaugural Courage in STEM Award, is an Afghan tech entrepreneur and advocate for women in STEM. As the founder and CEO of Citadel Software in Herat, she is one of Afghanistan's first female tech CEOs. Defying societal barriers to create opportunities for women in technology, she gained international recognition for founding and coaching the Afghan Dreamers, an all-girl robotics team that overcame immense challenges to compete on the global stage. Despite threats from the Taliban, she remained steadfast in her mission, establishing tech education centers across Afghanistan and South Asia to empower young women.

Genius Awardee **Edgar McGregor**, a 24-year-old meteorologist, has demonstrated the life-saving power of hyperlocal weather forecasting. Through his Facebook page, "Altadena Weather and Climate," he warned residents of fire dangers in the San Rafael mountains before officials issued alerts. On January 7, 2025, his urgent posts about extreme fire conditions in Eaton Canyon helped spur evacuations, saving hundreds of lives. His dedication to environmental awareness and public safety underscores the crucial role of citizen scientists in modern disaster response.

Leo Villareal, a Mexican-American artist in Brooklyn who is also receiving the Genius Award, is a pioneer in the realm of digital art and large-scale light installations. Fusing art with technology, he is known for "The Bay Lights," a monumental light sculpture that illuminated the San Francisco Bay Bridge, transforming it into an iconic work of public art. His dynamic, algorithm-driven creations captivate audiences worldwide, demonstrating the limitless possibilities of art in the digital age.

In addition to the Genius Award honorees, the gala will pay special tribute to **Dr. Margarita Camacho**, a cardiac surgeon who has performed more than 700 heart transplants at Newark Beth Israel Hospital and whose tireless and exceptional work has inspired more than 13,000 students participating in LSC's *Live From Surgery* and *Meet the Surgeon* programs.

Paul Hoffman, President and CEO of Liberty Science Center and creator of the Genius Awards, will preside over the ceremony at the Center, located at 222 Jersey City Blvd., Jersey City, NJ.

"This year's class of Genius Award honorees exemplifies the power of curiosity, perseverance, and fearless innovation," said Hoffman. "Each of these individuals has not only pushed the boundaries of what is possible in their respective fields but also inspired new generations to think boldly and dream big."

Distinguished presenters will include **Governor Phil Murphy** and **Mayor Steve Fulop**. There will be a special musical performance by **Jude Kofie**, a 13-year-old boy from Aurora Colorado, who was born prematurely with numerous health complications that resulted in him being on oxygen and on feeding tubes until he was eight years old. After the tubes came out, Jude taught himself how to play the piano and within two years he was on stage with the global superstar musician Kelly Clarkson on *The Kelly Clarkson Show* in Hollywood and then at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. He has also performed with renowned gospel superstar CeCe Winans.

The Genius Gala is an annual commemoration of innovation, accomplishment, creativity, science, and technology. It also serves as the Center's chief fundraising event. Since its inception, the Genius Gala has raised more than \$25 million to benefit LSC's STEM education programs, helping to make world-class science learning accessible to students, teachers, and families, most notably for those in high-needs, underserved communities.

Not just a fundraiser, the event serves to bring attention to and celebrate the creative individuals who are changing our world for the better through science. The 750,000+ visitors to the Center this year will find the 2025 inductees in the Center's permanent Genius Gallery display, along with past recipients: Andrea "Annie" Kritcher, Nicholas Schiff, Dr. Joseph L. Graves, Jr., John C. Mather, Katalin Karikó, Dr. Uma Valeti, Hugh Herr, Priyamvada Natarajan, Dr. Robert Montgomery, William Conan Davis, Jennifer A. Lewis, Moshe Safdie, Katherine Johnson, Ray Kurzweil, Marc Raibert and SpotMini, Frank Gehry, Jack Horner, Ellen Langer, Kip Thorne, Sir Richard Branson, Garry Kasparov, Jane Goodall, Oliver Sacks, Temple Grandin, Dean Kamen, Sylvia Earle, Craig Venter, Cori Bargmann, Ernő Rubik, Jeff Bezos, Vint Cerf, Jill Tarter, Sara Seager, George Church, Vitalik Buterin, Laurie Santos, Chris Messina, Martine Rothblatt, and Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz.

Paul and Phyllis Fireman are the Platinum Chair of the event, which is attended by hundreds of industry leaders and philanthropists from the NY/NJ metropolitan area.

The Innovation Chairs are **Bruce L. Levy**, President and CEO, BMR Energy; **John H. and Regina K. Scully**; **Gregory Tusar**, Head of Institutional Product, Coinbase; and **Josh Weston**, Honorary Chairman, ADP.

The Co-Chairs are **David Barry**, Founder and CEO, Urby; **Sheri B. Bronstein**, Chief People Officer, Bank of America; **Alma DeMetropolis**, Managing Director, Market Manager, J.P. Morgan Private Bank; **Clarissa Goncalves**, CFO, Global Product & Technology, Global Security, Strategy, and Procurement, ADP; **Richard M. Hodosh**, Former Medical Director, Atlantic Brain and Spine Institute; **Stephen R. Howe, Jr.**, Retired Chairman, Ernst & Young LLP; **Laura Overdeck**, Founder, Bedtime Math; **Chirag Patel**, Co-CEO and President, Amneal Pharmaceuticals; **Al Reba**, SVP, Cardiovascular & Immunology Commercialization, Bristol Myers Squibb; **Anthony T. Skiadas**, EVP, CFO, Verizon Communications; **Caroline Tillett**, PhD, Chief Scientific Officer, Kenvue; and **Timothy Tracy**, Global Client Service Partner, Americas Private Equity Leader, EY.

About Liberty Science Center

Liberty Science Center (LSC.org) is a 300,000-square-foot, not-for-profit learning center located in Liberty State Park on the Jersey City bank of the Hudson near the Statue of Liberty. Dedicated to inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers and bringing the power, promise, and pure fun of science and technology to learners of all ages, Liberty Science Center houses the largest planetarium in the Western Hemisphere, 11 museum exhibition halls, a live animal collection with 110 species, giant aquariums, a 3D theater, live simulcast surgeries, a tornado-force wind simulator, K-12 classrooms and labs, and teacher-development programs. More than 250,000 students visit the Science Center each year, and tens of thousands more participate in the Center's off-site and online programs. Welcoming more than 750,000 visitors annually, LSC is the largest interactive science center in the NYC-NJ metropolitan area.