



MEDIA CONTACT

Mary Meluso

201.253.1335 | [mmeluso@lsc.org](mailto:mmeluso@lsc.org)

## **LIBERTY SCIENCE CENTER CELEBRATED INNOVATION AND COURAGE AT 13TH ANNUAL GENIUS GALA AND RAISED \$3.1M**

*Honors Nobel Laureate Jennifer Doudna, Afghan Tech Trailblazer Roya Mahboob,  
Climate Scientist Edgar McGregor, and Digital Artist Leo Villareal*

JERSEY CITY, NJ, May 22, 2025 – Liberty Science Center celebrated science, innovation, and human ingenuity at its 13th Annual Genius Gala. The sold-out event recognized four exceptional individuals whose groundbreaking work is transforming fields from gene editing and robotics to weather science and digital art.

Jennifer Doudna, Nobel Prize-winning biochemist and co-inventor of CRISPR gene-editing technology, was presented the Liberty Science Center’s highest honor, the Genius Award, by Victoria Gray, the first patient to receive gene-editing therapy for sickle cell disease. Doudna’s revolutionary work in molecular biology has opened new frontiers in medicine, agriculture, and biotechnology, with the potential to cure genetic diseases and reshape the future of human health. The evening marked the first time that Doudna and Gray met in person. Doudna said, “What I’m really excited about is that I strongly believe we are on the verge of this technology becoming a standard of care, and something that is affordable. It’s going to take all of us to get it done.”

Roya Mahboob, the evening’s recipient of LSC’s inaugural Courage in STEM Award, was celebrated for her visionary leadership as one of Afghanistan’s first female tech CEOs. As founder of Citadel Software and the Afghan Dreamers robotics team, Mahboob has championed women’s education and empowerment across Afghanistan and South Asia—often at great personal risk. She said, “I saw the power of technology and I just wanted to open the door for many other young girls who are curious. Every girl, no matter where they are born or where they grew up, has the talent and it's just about giving them access to the opportunities and technology.”

Climate scientist Edgar McGregor, 24, also received a Genius Award for his lifesaving work in hyperlocal weather forecasting. His early warnings about wildfire risks in Eaton Canyon on January 7, 2025, prompted evacuations that helped save hundreds of lives. McGregor’s story underscores the power of citizen science in disaster preparedness and public safety. He said, “I base all of my work on the idea of pleasant surprise...It melts my heart that I am able to help people and I hope that everyone goes home today and engages with their local community and finds something in which they can pleasantly surprise others.”

Digital artist Leo Villareal was honored with a Genius Award for his pioneering large-scale light sculptures and algorithm-driven artwork. Known globally for *The Bay Lights* installation on the San Francisco Bay Bridge, Villareal blends technology and creativity to transform public spaces into immersive visual experiences. He said, “These monumental public art works have the power to transform cities where they're installed. The projects are free for all to enjoy and bring this together

around what I think of as digital campfires, they create a sense of luck and celebrate our connection to one another.”

The Gala also paid special tribute to Dr. Margarita Camacho, a cardiac surgeon at Newark Beth Israel Hospital who has performed 750 heart transplants and inspired over 13,000 students through LSC’s acclaimed *Live From Surgery* and *Meet the Surgeon* programs. One of her heart transplant patients, Paul Fireman, former Chairman and CEO of Reebok International, expressed his gratitude. He said, “Because of Dr. Camacho’s commitment to helping other human beings, I have a new lease on life. For that I have no words to express my appreciation.”

“This year’s honorees exemplify the boundless potential of science, resilience, and imagination,” said Paul Hoffman, President and CEO of Liberty Science Center and founder of the Genius Awards. “Each has redefined what’s possible—and they’ve done so in ways that lift up their communities and inspire future generations.”

Distinguished guests and presenters included New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy and Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop. There was also a musical performance by Jude Kofie, a 13-year-old self-taught piano prodigy who overcame early health challenges to perform on national stages with artists including Kelly Clarkson and CeCe Winans.

The Genius Gala is Liberty Science Center’s premier fundraising event, and last night raised \$3.1 million to support the Center’s STEM education programs for students, teachers, and families—particularly in underserved communities. Since its inception, the Gala has raised more than \$28 million to expand access to world-class science learning.

Attendees included leaders in business, philanthropy, and academia. **Paul and Phyllis Fireman** served as Platinum Chairs. Innovation Chairs included **Bruce L. Levy** (BMR Energy), **John H. and Regina K. Scully**, **Gregory Tusar** (Coinbase), and **Josh Weston** (ADP).

The Co-Chairs were **David Barry** (Urby), **Sheri B. Bronstein** (Bank of America), **Alma DeMetropolis** (J.P. Morgan Private Bank), **Clarissa Goncalves** (ADP), **Richard M. Hodosh** (Atlantic Brain and Spine Institute), **Stephen R. Howe, Jr.**, (Ernst & Young LLP), **Laura Overdeck**, (Bedtime Math), **Chirag Patel** (Amneal Pharmaceuticals), **Al Reba** (Bristol Myers Squibb), **Anthony T. Skiadas** (Verizon Communications), **Caroline Tillet** (Kenvue), and **Timothy Tracy** (EY).

The 2025 Genius Gallery inductees are featured on a permanent display at Liberty Science Center alongside an esteemed roster of past honorees. More than 750,000 visitors annually will have the opportunity to explore the stories of this year’s luminaries and those who came before them—including Jane Goodall, Temple Grandin, Jeff Bezos, and Vitalik Buterin.

### **About Liberty Science Center**

Liberty Science Center ([LSC.org](https://www.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.