



MEDIA CONTACT
Mary Meluso
201.253.1335 | mmeluso@lsc.org

LIBERTY SCIENCE CENTER GENIUS GALA TO HONOR CHRIS MESSINA, HASHTAG INVENTOR; MARTINE ROTHBLATT, BIOTECH AND SATELLITE RADIO PIONEER; AND DRS. SALLY AND BENNETT SHAYWITZ, THE WORLD'S LEADING EXPERTS ON DYSLEXIA

- Supermodel, Entrepreneur and Tech Advocate Karlie Kloss Announced as Recipient of Inaugural Strides in STEM Award -

JERSEY CITY, N.J., May 13, 2019 – The hashtag has become the defining communications symbol of the 21st Century, thanks to a simple idea conceived by a Silicon Valley product designer more than a decade ago. When that designer first proposed the hashtag to executives at then-nascent Twitter as a way to create identifiable groups on the platform, he was turned down flat and told: “These things are for nerds. They’re never going to catch on.”

On Monday, May 13, that nerd, **Chris Messina**, will be hailed as a “Genius.” He is one of the recipients of Liberty Science Center’s prestigious 2019 Genius Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Center.

Genius is certainly also an apt description of the Genius Gala’s other honorees. **Martine Rothblatt** is the founder, chairwoman, and chief executive officer of United Therapeutics, which she established to find a cure when her then young daughter was diagnosed with pulmonary arterial hypertension, a fatal disease. Not only did she succeed, her company now offers five FDA-approved drugs; four for that disease and one for neuroblastoma.

Rothblatt is also a pioneer of pig cloning, with the goal of achieving lung transplants that the human body doesn’t reject, and is a staunch advocate of employing nano and cybernetic technology to extend human life. Earlier in her professional life, she co-founded what is now Sirius XM, the first satellite-to-car broadcasting company.

Then there are **Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz**, who through their 35 years of research as co-founders and co-directors of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, totally debunked the myth that people afflicted with dyslexia were less intelligent. Working together, this husband-and-wife team discovered dyslexia’s neurological basis, pioneered effective therapies, and changed public attitudes about the most common learning disorder in the United States.

In addition to the Genius Gala honorees, the Liberty Science Center will debut its first-ever Strides in STEM Award to be presented to supermodel, entrepreneur and current host of *Project Runway*, **Karlie Kloss**. Kloss is being recognized for her work through her nonprofit, Kode with Klossy, which she founded in 2015 to create learning experiences and opportunities for young women that increase their confidence and inspire them to pursue their passions in a technology-driven world.

Messina, Kloss, Rothblatt, and the Shaywitzes will receive their awards at the creative black-tie gala at Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, NJ. The event will benefit the Center’s exhibitions and programs, particularly the science-education programs that LSC delivers to 91,000 “at-risk” children across the New Jersey/New York Region.

“Our 2019 Genius Award Winners and our first-ever Strides in STEM honoree are five visionary women and men of science who are busting paradigms,” declared LSC President and CEO Paul Hoffman. “Each personifies what it means to be a genius and a catalyst for change; each is using his or her exceptional intellectual and creative abilities to disrupt and innovate both in their respective fields and for the betterment of humanity, and each recognizes the importance of ensuring the next generation of science and technology superstars have access to the tools they need to succeed.”

Messina, Kloss, Rothblatt, and the Shaywitzes will also be recognized in LSC’s *Genius Gallery*, a permanent, interactive display at Liberty Science Center. They will be joining past honorees **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, and Laurie Santos.**

The 2019 Genius Gala, which begins at 6:00 pm, brings together hundreds of industry leaders and philanthropists from the NY/NJ metropolitan area. And the corporate chairs and co-chairs of the commemoration represent a veritable “Who’s Who” of the tri-state area’s business and industry titans. The corporate chairs are David M. Daly, President and COO, PSE&G; Michael J. Inserra, Senior Vice Chair and Americas Deputy Managing Partner, EY; and Chirag Patel, Chairman, Avtar Investments. The co-chairs are David Barry, President and CEO, Ironstate Development Company, and President and CEO, Urby; Sheri B. Bronstein, Chief Human Resources Officer, Bank of America; Brian Carlin, CEO, Wealth Management Solutions, JPMorgan Chase & Company; Jennifer A. Chalsty, Director, Advisory Council, James Buchanan Brady Urological Institute, Johns Hopkins University; Kevin P. Conlin, Chairman of the Board, CEO, and President, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey; Michael DeMarco, CEO, Mack-Cali Realty Corporation; Matthew D. Ellis, EVP and CFO, Verizon Communications; Joe Hand, Esq., EVP, Global Human Resources and Corporate Services, Celgene Corporation; Robert J. Hariri, MD, PhD, Co-Founder and Vice Chairman, Human Longevity, Inc., and Chairman, Founder, and CEO, Celularity, Inc.; Barbara G. Koster, SVP and CIO, Prudential Financial, Inc.; Bruce L. Levy, President and CEO, BMR Energy; Laura Bilodeau Overdeck, Founder and President, Bedtime Math and John Overdeck, Co-Chairman and Co-Founder, Two Sigma; Andrew Penson, Founder and Managing Director, Argent Ventures; Carlos Rodriguez, President and CEO, ADP; Gregory Tusar, Co-Founder, Tagomi Systems; and Josh S. Weston, Honorary Chairman, ADP.

Ticket prices start at \$1,250 per guest with options for table sponsorship from \$12,500 to \$100,000. For more details, please visit lsc.org/gala.

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, 12 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.