



Press Release

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Vertical Flight Society Announces 2026 Scholarship Recipients \$132,500 in Scholarships Awarded to 33 Students

Fairfax, Virginia, April 7, 2026 — The Vertical Flight Society is pleased to announce its 2026 Vertical Flight Foundation (VFF) scholarship recipients. A total of \$132,500 in scholarships are being awarded this year to 33 talented engineering students interested in vertical flight, 32 through the Foundation and one from the newly established Vertical Flight Knowledge Initiative (VFKI). The scholarships include cash awards of between \$3,250 and \$6,000.

“Established in 1967 and distributing funds since 1977, our Vertical Flight Foundation Scholarships have helped inspire generations of students to pursue careers in vertical flight, with many now holding leadership positions in industry, academia and government. We are proud to announce that, to date, more than 750 scholarships have been awarded, totaling over \$2.1 million in support,” said VFS Executive Director Angelo Collins.

The following are this year’s awardees, who will be recognized before the Nikolsky Lectureship on Tuesday, May 5, 2026. The event will be one of the highlights of the Vertical Flight Society’s 82nd Annual Forum & Technology Display, taking place May 5–7, 2026, West Palm Beach, Florida, USA (see [Forum 82](#)).

Bachelor’s Degree Recipients

- **Chien-En (Esther) Kung, University of California Davis:** [Alex Stoll Scholarship](#), honoring the memory, passion and creative genius of one of pioneers of electric flight, **awarded \$5,000 through the Alex Stoll Memorial Foundation.**
- **Parvathi Rithesh Menon, Texas A&M University:** [Bob Lynn Scholarship](#), which honors the memory of the former Bell Helicopter executive and AHS leader par excellence
- **Giol Vinyalsi -i-Roca, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University:** [Friedrich Straub Scholarship](#), honoring the former senior manager of dynamics technology and technical fellow of The Boeing Company.
- **Elena Wu, University of Maryland:** [Dr. Wei Chong \(Ben\) Sim Memorial Scholarship](#), honoring the US Army acoustics research scientist.

Master’s Degree Recipients

- **Peter Capozzoli, University of Maryland:** [Robert Head Scholarship](#), honoring the engineering pioneer from Hughes/McDonnell Douglas/Boeing.
- **Yuval Enciu, University of Maryland:** [Eugene K. Liberatore Scholarship](#) which honors the memory of a pioneering helicopter engineer, author and historian
- **Ksenia Kirsanova, Pennsylvania State University:** [John J. Schneider Scholarship](#), honoring the memory of a preeminent VTOL aircraft designer and historian.
- **Darrell Nieves Lugo, University of Central Florida:** [Joseph P. Cribbins Scholarship](#), honoring the individual who had perhaps the most influence and long-term impact on US Army Aviation logistics

in the 20th century.

- **Aleksandr Lutsenko, Georgia Institute of Technology:** [Stratford Chapter Scholarship](#), in honor of the VFS Stratford, CT Chapter's historic and prolific stewardship to the Foundation.
- **Samuel Michael Renz, University of Maryland:** [VFS Arizona Chapter Scholarship](#), funded by a generous donation from the Vertical Flight Society's Arizona Chapter for outstanding academic achievement and dedication to pursuing a career in vertical flight
- **Ritwik Shankar, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur:** [Dr. Richard M. Carlson Scholarship](#), former Hiller and Lockheed engineer who became the chief of the Army's Advanced Systems Research and Analysis Office at Ames Research Center.
- **Huy Tran, University of California Davis:** [Igor I. Sikorsky Scholarship](#), honoring one of the most important figures in the design and development of rotary winged vehicles into practical and useful aircraft. He founded what would later become the Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation.
- **Steven Yon, Oklahoma State University:** [Redstone Chapter Barry J. Baskett Scholarship](#), honoring the memory of a career US Army engineer who led Aviation Engineering, and later managed the Aviation Technology Base Program.

Doctorate Degree Recipients

- **Siddhant Sandeep Bapat, Pennsylvania State University:** [Dr. E. Roberts \(Bob\) Wood Scholarship](#), named for the preeminent aeromechanics engineer and beloved professor who inspired generations.
- **Hauke Till Bartzsch,* Leibniz University Hanover:** [Bell Textron Scholarship](#), \$5000 awarded to the top scoring applicant and provided by a generous endowment from the company. Hauke is also recognized as the [Dr. Dewey H. Hodges](#), recipient as a top applicant in the aeromechanics field and honoring the beloved professor at Georgia Institute of Technology.
- **Pratibha Bhandari, Oklahoma State University:** [Dr. Frank Caradonna Scholarship](#), honoring the US Army Emeritus Scientist who worked for 43 years at the Ames Research Center in flight dynamics as a researcher and mentor.
- **Rajan Bhandari, Auburn University:** [M.A. "Tony" McVeigh Scholarship](#), honoring the memory of the Boeing advanced rotorcraft designer and mentor.
- **Batin Bugday, University of Maryland:** [Hal Andrews Scholarship](#), which remembers a preeminent Navy aviation engineer, advisor and historian.
- **Katrina Cecco, University of Toronto:** [Women of Vertical Flight Engineering Network \(WOVEN\) Scholarship](#), \$5000 awarded to a woman for academic excellence and commitment to engineering in vertical flight through a generous donation from Marilyn Pearson.
- **Margaret Donovan, University of Maryland:** [Dr. Richard L. Bennett Scholarship](#), honoring the longtime Bell researcher, university professor and consultant.
- **Jack Dooher, Texas A&M University:** [Troy M. Gaffey Scholarship](#), honoring his major roles in the development of the tiltrotor at Bell and the coaxial compound helicopter as CEO of AVX Aircraft.
- **Sage Herz, Ohio State University:** [VFS San Francisco Bay Area Chapter Scholarship](#), funded by a generous donation from the Vertical Flight Society's San Francisco Chapter for outstanding academic achievement and dedication to pursuing a career in vertical flight
- **Soohyeon Lee, Pennsylvania State University:** [Prof. Barnes McCormick Scholarship](#), honoring Penn State's venerable Boeing Professor Emeritus.
- **Adam Rozman, Boston University:** [Howard C. "Pat" Curtiss Scholarship](#) honoring the pioneering Princeton University rotorcraft aeromechanics researcher and educator
- **Muneeb Safdar, University of Maryland:** [Dr. Jing Yen VFF Scholarship for Cost Awareness](#), \$6,000 awarded to a top applicant with a focus on improving rotorcraft affordability,

generously donated by Dr. Yen.

- **Joao Santos, University of Sao Paulo:** [Santino "Tino" Pancotti Scholarship](#) honoring the former technical lead for Agusta and AgustaWestland (now Leonardo Helicopters)
- **Isabelle Sanz, Georgia Institute of Technology:** [Franklin D. Harris Scholarship](#), honoring the contributions and memory of 65 years of dedicated service and numerous contributions to the rotorcraft industry.
- **Sridatta Satuluri, University of Maryland:** [GE Aerospace Scholarship](#), prolific donor to the foundation, honoring the Lynn, MA facility and it's employees, home to the first U.S. jet engine (1942) and other prominent vertical flight milestones.
- **Logan Swaisgood, University of Maryland:** [Dr. Alfred Gessow Scholarship](#), honoring a pioneer in the helicopter field at NACA/NASA and founder of the University of Maryland rotorcraft center.
- **Jeremy Seeyave, Georgia Institute of Technology:** [Charles C. Crawford Scholarship](#), named in memory of the former Army Aviation development leader, GTRI researcher and past VFS Board Chair.
- **Duncan Waanders, Georgia Institute of Technology:** [Dr. Robin Gray Scholarship](#), honoring the beloved Georgia Tech professor who taught generations of students.
- **Daniella York, University of Liverpool:** [Geoff Byham Scholarship](#), honoring an architect of advanced rotor aerodynamics at Westland Helicopters, Yeovil, England (now Leonardo Helicopters).

Check out all the VFF winners at [VFF Scholarship Recipients](#).

The Vertical Flight Foundation (VFF), established in 1967 as the philanthropic arm of the Vertical Flight Society, supports the future of vertical flight through education. Since 1977, its merit-based scholarship program has recognized and supported outstanding students pursuing careers in vertical flight. For more information about the Foundation or to contribute, visit <https://vtol.org/vff>, where you can also explore past scholarship recipients and their success stories.

VFF and VFS are both recognized by the US Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)(3) charities. VFS covers all overhead costs of administration and accounting, so 100% of every tax-deductible contribution to VFF goes directly to student scholarships.

Founded as the American Helicopter Society in 1943, the Vertical Flight Society is the global non-profit society for engineers, scientists and others working on vertical flight technology. For more than 80 years, the Society has led technical, safety, advocacy and other important initiatives, and has been the primary forum for interchange of information on vertical flight technology.

The Vertical Flight Society

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