Press Release

Contact:
Julie M. Gibbs
pr@vtol.org
(703) 684-6777

Vertical Flight Society Announces 2026 Lichten Award Winners

Selected for Technical Excellence from First-Time Technical Paper Presenters

Fairfax, Virginia, March 24, 2026 — The Vertical Flight Society today announced the winners of its prestigious Robert L. Lichten technical award. The overall winner will be recognized at the Opening General Session & Nikolsky Lectureship on Tuesday, May 5, 2026, during the Society's 82nd Annual Forum & Technology Display in West Palm Beach, Florida, USA.

Parth Kumar of Joby Aviation was selected as the overall Lichten Award Winner. His winning paper, "A High Integrity State Machine Framework for In-Flight Disturbance Injection and Failure Response Validation," will be presented at Forum 82 on Thursday morning, May 7, during the Handling Qualities I session. Mr. Kumar was also the winner of the VFS US Western Region Lichten Competition.

Al Brand of Bell and the current VFS Technical Director commented on the winning paper "*This is a great achievement for Parth Kumar and his co-authors at Joby Aviation. The paper about the disturbance generator shows a remarkable piece of aviation ingenuity".*

Visesh Uppoor from the University of Maryland was selected as the Lichten Award Runner-up for his paper, "Hingeless Rotor Aeroelastic Stability Measurement and Validation at High Advance Ratios." His paper will be presented during the Dynamics II technical session on Wednesday morning, May 6. He was the VFS Southeast US Region Lichten Competition winner.

The other regional winners are as follows:

- **Vladimir Nunez-Garcia of Georgia Technology Research Institute**, winner of the US Southern Region with his paper, "Rotor-Rotor Aerodynamic Interactions – Moment Effects on Efficiency in Forward Flight". His paper will be presented at Forum 82 during the Test & Evaluation II session scheduled for Thursday morning, May 7, 2026.
- **Federica Russo of Leonardo Helicopters**, was the Europe-Africa Region winner for her paper, "Shaping the Future through the Past – the Beginning of Leonard Helicopters' Journey in Convertible Rotorcraft Design." This paper will be presented during the History session on Wednesday morning, May 6.

The Robert L. Lichten Award was established in 1976 to encourage VFS members who have not previously presented the results of their work at a technical meeting to begin to do so through presentations at local and regional VFS meetings. The overall Lichten Award Winner is invited to present his/her technical paper at the Forum and receives a $500 honorarium, sponsored by Bell Textron, Inc. The runner-up is also invited to present at the Forum and receives a recognition certificate.

The Lichten Award honors the memory of Robert L. Lichten, who spent his career at Bell. In 1958, his work led to the first full-conversion of a tiltrotor to airplane-mode flight and he is considered the 'Pioneer of Tiltrotor Technology.' He became director of advanced technology at Bell and served as the Vertical Flight Society's 22nd President from 1965-1966.

Information about VFS's 82nd Annual Forum & Technology Display is available at vtol.org/events/forum-82.

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
2700 Prosperity Avenue, Suite 275, Fairfax, VA 22031 USA
+1-703-684-6777 | staff@vtol.org | www.vtol.org