



Press Release

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**Vertical Flight Society Announces
2024 Individual Recipients of Its Prestigious Awards**

Nine vertical flight leaders recognized for their invaluable contributions

Fairfax, VA, March 6, 2024 — The Vertical Flight Society (VFS) today announces the 2024 individual recipients of its prestigious awards program. Since its establishment in 1944, the VFS awards program has paid tribute to the outstanding leaders of vertical flight and served as a catalyst for stimulating technological advances. This year’s winners will be recognized at the Grand Awards Banquet on Thursday, May 9, 2024, during the Society’s **80th Annual Forum and Technology Display** in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

“Since Igor Sikorsky and Gen. H. Franklin Gregory were first honored in 1944, the Vertical Flight Society has been recognizing the leading contributors to advancing vertical flight,” said VFS Executive Director Angelo Collins. “Those being recognized this year have made invaluable contributions to a broad range of vertical flight efforts — past, present and future.”

Darryl Toni, Senior Technical Fellow, Dynamics at Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin Company, is this year’s honored recipient of the **Dr. Alexander Klemin Award**, the highest honor the Vertical Flight Society bestows on an individual for notable achievement in advancing the field of vertical flight aeronautics. Toni will be recognized for his contributions to the advancement of Vertical Flight, particularly in the areas of Structural Analysis and Rotorcraft Structural Integrity.

The title of **Honorary Fellow** is granted to highly distinguished Society members who have made exceptional leadership, innovative or other meritorious contributions that have significantly advanced the Society and the vertical flight community during their career. The 2024 Honorary Fellows are:

- **Mr. Gene P. Munson**, Retired. Munson devoted his career to flight testing rotorcraft at Bell Helicopter and Boeing. After retiring, Munson continued as a vertical flight consultant. Munson has been a member of VFS for over 55 years, he served as advisor on the Board of Directors, helped build the VFS Vertipedia database, and held numerous local and national offices.
- **Dr. Clifford B. Smith**, Lockheed Martin Fellow. Smith is a leader in the test community who always engages on complex test efforts developing innovative test solutions while mentoring coaching young engineers. He is recognized for this exceptional leadership in Test and Evaluation and for his inspiring leadership of the next generation of vertical flight engineers, as well as his dedicated and energetic service of the Vertical Flight Society for the last 30 years.

The title of **Technical Fellow** is granted to Society members whose career-based accomplishments towards the goals and objectives of the vertical flight technical community constitute an outstanding technical achievement. The 2024 Technical Fellows are:

- **Dr. Anubhav Datta**, Alfred Gessow Rotorcraft Center, University of Maryland. For his research and academic leadership in the rotorcraft aeromechanics discipline. Datta is an award-winning researcher and educator who has led significant contributions to the state of the art in vertical flight engineering, having educated and mentored a generation of rotary wing engineers who have gone on to successful careers in Industry, government, and academia.
- **Mr. Rohit Jain**, Aerospace Engineer with the US Army Futures Command DEVCOM Aviation and Missile Center. For his technical expertise in rotary-wing aerodynamics, unsteady fluid dynamics, turbulence and transition models, software development, and parallel computing.
- **Mr. Carl Ockier**, Senior Expert Flight Test Engineering Rotorcraft at Airbus Helicopters. For his record of career-based outstanding technical achievements in the fields of handling qualities, flight testing and rotorcraft evaluation.
- **Mr. Christopher Silva**, Senior Technical Advisor and Technical Lead, Revolutionary Vertical Lift Technology Project, NASA. For being a recognized leader in developing aircraft conceptual design methodologies, providing enabling technology towards making passenger-carrying eVTOL aircraft a reality.

The **John J. Schneider Historical Achievement Award** is given in recognition of distinguished achievement by an individual in encouraging appreciation of, and enhancing access to, the history and legacy of vertical flight aircraft. This year's recipient is **Erasmio Piñero, Jr.**, an engineer at Airborne Tactical Advantage Company (ATAC), a Textron company. Piñero is a decades-long supporter of vertical flight history. He has authored numerous historical papers and supporting presentations. As a long-time member of the VFS History Committee he has nominated several Vertical Flight Heritage Sites as well as facilitated several VFS Annual Forum History Sessions.

The annual **François-Xavier Bagnoud Award** is given to a Society member who is 35 years old or younger for outstanding career-to-date contributions to vertical flight technology. This year's award recipient is **Dr. William Staruk**, Engineer at Joby Aviation. Staruk was recognized for significant contributions in advancing three-dimensional modeling and wind-tunnel testing of rotors.

The Vertical Flight Society was founded as the American Helicopter Society in 1943 by the pioneers of the helicopter industry, who believed that technological cooperation and collaboration was essential to advance vertical flight. VFS 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 technology, safety, advocacy, and other important initiatives, and has been the primary forum for interchange of information on vertical flight technology. Descriptions of the awards and past recipients are available at www.vtol.org/awards.

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