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FIRST Chesapeake Robotics, Leidos, and Dominion Energy, honor five Outstanding Women in STEM

Richmond, VA. May 3, 2022 – Patricia F. Mead, Ph.D., chair of the Engineering Department at Norfolk State University, was honored today with the Reaching for the Stars: Outstanding Women in STEM Award as part of the kickoff for the fourth annual Women in STEM celebration hosted by *FIRST* Chesapeake Robotics and sponsored by Leidos. *FIRST* Chesapeake recognized the work of Dr. Patricia Mead as a leading advocate for educational reform, with an emphasis on broadening participation for under-represented groups in STEM disciplines and educational assessment.

The award is the beginning of the *FIRST* Chesapeake Women in STEM months-long celebration, sponsored by Leidos, and in partnership with Dominion Energy and Canon Virginia.

“As a longtime supporter of *FIRST* Chesapeake, Leidos is proud to recognize Dr. Mead’s extensive contributions to both education and social justice,” said Robert Franceschini, Deputy Chief Technology Officer at Leidos, and a *FIRST* Chesapeake Board Member. “Diversity and inclusion promote the standards of excellence that have always been associated with the Leidos brand. We know diverse teams produce the best results in business, and we are invested in promoting a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture for the future.”

Leighann Scott Boland, Executive Director of *FIRST* Chesapeake, noted, “*FIRST* Chesapeake is committed to bringing high-quality robotics programs to middle and high school students and to fostering an inclusive environment for our students, alumni, adult mentors and volunteers in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. Our 370+ robotics teams and 3,500+ volunteers reflect the diversity of the *FIRST* Chesapeake community. Dr. Mead’s work to promote expanded opportunities for women and others goes to the heart of our mission to help build tomorrow’s technology leaders.”

FIRST Chesapeake proudly boasts a 40% female participation rate among its team members, volunteers, and team mentors. In order to foster ever-increasing female participation and recognition for its female team members, *FIRST* Chesapeake has partnered with Dominion Energy which sponsored the Reaching for the Stars: Women in STEM Scholarships for four outstanding young women associated with *FIRST* Chesapeake teams: Meghan MacFarland from Rockville, MD; Tess

Eluvathingal Muttikal from Charlottesville, VA; Sara Huelskamp from Grantsville, MD; and Shivani Vedhere from Charlottesville, VA.

As the Primary Scholarship recipient, Meghan MacFarland will receive a \$3,000 scholarship sponsored by Dominion Energy to the school of her choice. Meghan had been involved with the *FIRST* program beginning in middle school and throughout high school. One of her personal goals is to build a welcoming community for women in STEM, and she has done this through the creation of local in-person and virtual women in STEM panel groups and other robotics teams. During the pandemic, her team, MoCo STUDS 17037, searched for creative ways to reach out to members in the community. Using the *FIRST* @ Home curriculum they taught STEM classes and *FIRST* values of mentorship and *coopertition* to children in the US, Mexico, Lebanon, and Brazil. They were even asked by *FIRST* Inspires to create a webinar for teaching others in *FIRST*'s international community about this resource. Outside of her work with her team, she is a member of the National Honor Society and a member of the Good Counsel Project Lead the Way (PLTW) STEM Program.

About *FIRST*® Chesapeake

Virginia *FIRST* dba *FIRST* Chesapeake is an independent non-profit that brings STEM-based leadership programs to middle and high school students in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. More than 7,000 students participate in the 370+ teams administered by *FIRST* Chesapeake. To learn more about *FIRST* Chesapeake, go to www.firstchesapeake.org . Follow Us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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