

Astronaut Collins receives 2005 Free Spirit Award

Eileen Marie Collins, the first female space shuttle commander, received the 2005 Al Neuharth Free Spirit of the Year Award. The award is given annually to a person in the news who has stirred the public's hearts and souls by demonstrating the human capacity to dream, dare and do. The award carried a \$100,000 stipend.



Eileen Marie Collins

Collins' dreams of flight carried her from pilot lessons at age 19 to college, then Air Force pilot training and eventually to NASA's astronaut program. She became an astronaut and the first female pilot of a space shuttle. In 2005, Collins commanded NASA's "return to flight" mission, its first since the space shuttle Columbia broke apart over Texas in 2003.

"As an astronaut and free spirit, it is my hope that the space program will inspire all people to reach for their dreams, because dreams do come true," Collins said.

Former President Bill Clinton once said of Eileen Collins that "her life is a story of challenges set and challenges met." Collins has logged more than 6,750 hours in 30 different types of aircraft, including more than 535

hours in space. She has been honored with the Defense Superior Service Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Defense Meritorious Service Medal and various other awards from the Air Force and NASA.

"For Collins, it seems that there are no frontiers too far or hurdles too high," said Charles L. Overby, chairman, chief executive officer and president of the Freedom Forum. "Her free spirit is obvious each time she flies, literally, in the face of adversity and convention."

Two individuals also were selected as Free Spirit honorees. Sean Tuohey, founder of Playing for Peace, and Joe Paterno, head football coach for Pennsylvania State University, received a stipend of \$10,000 each.

The award was named for Neuharth, founder of the Freedom Forum, upon his retirement from the board of trustees. Past Free Spirit winners include Aung San Suu Kyi, Barbara Bush, Terry Anderson, Chuck Yeager, Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and William J. Brennan, Greg Mortenson and Brian Lamb.



Sean Tuohey



Joe Paterno

102 students selected for ‘life-changing’ scholarships, conference

Brandon Taylor of Tamaqua, Pa., said getting named a Free Spirit scholar in 2005 was “bigger than getting accepted” to college.

Taylor and 101 other high school seniors — two each from all 50 states and the District of Columbia — participated in the Al Neuharth Free Spirit Scholarship and Conference program in March in Washington, D.C. At the conference, two top students were selected to receive \$50,000 college scholarships: Cyrus Moussavi, a senior at Cedar Falls High School in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and April Wang, a senior at Sycamore High School in Cincinnati. Two other high school seniors attending the conference received \$25,000 scholarships: Joyce Chen, Lowell High School, San Francisco, and Eric Gentry, DeSoto High School, DeSoto, Texas.

“It was definitely a great surprise,” Gentry told the *Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette*. “\$25,000 is a life-changing amount of money. What has had an even greater impact, however, is the week of experiences and the friends I made here.”

The program awarded a total of \$248,000 in college scholarships to the students, all of whom expressed an interest in pursuing journalism careers and demonstrated qualities of “free spirit.” Each of the other 98 students received a \$1,000 scholarship.

“These scholars were some of the most impressive young thinkers that we have encountered thus far,” said Chris Wells, senior vice president, Freedom Forum.

During the conference, the scholars met with leading broadcast and print journalists and toured media organizations. “The Free Spirit experience exposed me to the big world of journalism, one I had not experienced within my smaller community,” Taylor wrote in the Lehigh, Pa., *Times News*. “Speakers like (Al) Neuharth, (Tim) Russert, (Brian) Lamb ... encouraged me to continue my journalistic ambitions and made me realize I was on the right path.”

More than 100 newspapers joined the Freedom Forum in soliciting applications from high school seniors. Applicants were required to provide samples of their journalistic work and write an essay on free spirit. Top scholarship winners were selected through a competitive process.



Free Spirit scholars greet Al Neuharth with applause and smiles.