



## ORBITER NEWS

News, announcements, and more.

# Press Release: Aerospace Appoints Retired Major General Urrutia-Varhall to Board of Trustees

December 19, 2024



Chantilly, Va., Dec. 19, 2024 – The Aerospace Corporation (Aerospace) elected Air Force Major General (Ret.) and former director of operations at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Linda R. “UV” Urrutia-Varhall to its Board of Trustees on December 11, 2024.

Maj. Gen. Urrutia-Varhall’s military career spans more than 30 years including key leadership positions as the assistant deputy chief of staff, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Headquarters, U.S. Air Force (USAF) at the Pentagon, and director of ISR at U.S. Southern Command. Respected as a trusted advisor at the highest levels of government, she has brought her scientific, operational and intelligence expertise to developing and executing strategies and partnerships on a global scale.

“As the space domain becomes increasingly dynamic, greater integration across our government customers and mission areas will be critical to outpacing the evolving threat environment,” said Steve Isakowitz, Aerospace president and chief executive officer. “We’re delighted to welcome Maj. Gen. Urrutia-Varhall to our Board of Trustees, where her leadership and expertise within the U.S. Air Force and Intelligence Community will be invaluable in advancing innovative and integrated solutions to evolving threats facing our nation’s space enterprise.”

Throughout her decades-long career in the Air Force, Maj. Gen. Urrutia-Varhall held command and staff positions at the wing, major command, headquarters level and served in multiple joint assignments. She became the first USAF representative to the National Military Intelligence Center and was selected to command the first Air Force Information Warfare Flight at 9th Air Force/Central Air Forces, Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. She also served as the right hand to the director of National Intelligence and the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence.

In addition, she was recognized as the first Latina USAF Academy graduate and the first Latina to attain the rank of major general in the USAF. Among her many awards, Maj. Gen. Urrutia-Varhall was awarded the Air Force Distinguished Service Medal, the Defense Superior Service Medal (with three oak leaf clusters), the Legion of Merit (with oak leaf cluster) and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal (with three oak leaf clusters).

Aerospace’s Board of Trustees members have a myriad of backgrounds, representing academic and scientific institutions and public, government and national security interests. These different perspectives allow the board members to collectively provide unique guidance and oversight of the corporation’s activities.

# ALMA's 2nd Annual Spirit of Excellence Award Recognizes Two Awardees

December 18, 2024

Fostering a culture of leadership at Aerospace means strengthening an environment where everyone is empowered to pursue excellence in the work they do. Recognizing leaders who not only blaze new trails but strengthen those paths so that others can follow is essential to a more agile and vibrant workplace.

The Aerospace Latino Members Association (ALMA) hosted the second annual Spirit of Excellence Award earlier this month, recognizing two individuals for leading from the front and lifting up those around them while doing so. This year's recipients of the Spirit of Excellence Award were Maben Jimenez and Katy Veliz.

"By embracing different skills and viewpoints and experiences, we unlock creativity. We unlock the innovation needed to solve our customers' most challenging problems. The programs and initiatives that ALMA spearheads are a testament to that

vision. They support personal growth, expand professional networks and create pathways for recognition," said Dr. Debra Emmons, vice president and chief technology officer Aerospace. Emmons is ALMA's Senior Executive Sponsor. "The ALMA Spirit of Excellence Award honors leaders who are not just excelling in their careers, but they're also lifting others along the way. These are the people who inspire us and challenge us. They serve as role models, and they remind us of the power of community."

In 2023, ALMA established the Spirit of Excellence Award to recognize Aerospace employees who embody the principles of excellence at Aerospace and for their communities. The event also included remarks from ALMA leaders John Angarita, Alejandro Fernandez and David Cardoza. Last year's recipient, inaugural awardee Delilah Nunez, was in attendance and presented the award to this year's honorees.

## Meet the Awardees

**Maben Jimenez, associate principal director of Directorate H in the Electronic Programs Division**

Jimenez grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to Chicago to study mechanical engineering at Illinois Institute of Technology, where she holds a bachelor's degree. She went on to get her master's degree in theoretical and applied mechanics from Northwestern University. She joined Aerospace's Structures Department straight out of college in 1999, has progressed to make her impact across ETG, NSG and the Launch program office.

DSG General Manager Eric Hall provided the introduction for Jimenez at the ceremony and noted her ability to connect information and people, resulting in a "trail of success along the way." She's also an active mentor to students through



various programs like the GEM Fellows, STEM Advantage, while also giving back to the community in a variety of ways, including as a frequent volunteer at the Ballona Wetlands to help cleanups and habitat restoration.

“There’s something deeply fulfilling about working through complex problems, bringing data to the table and finding solutions to limit mission risk. It’s this sense of purpose that has kept me motivated throughout my career, and it’s one of the things that I love the most about Aerospace,” Jimenez said. “But just as important to me as the work and the mission is the opportunity to mentor others. I believe that success isn’t measured by personal accomplishments alone. It’s about helping those around us reach their full potential and empowering them to carry the mission forward. It’s a powerful way to make a lasting impact.”



2024 ALMA Spirit of Excellence awardees Maben Jimenez and Katy Veliz.

### **Katy Veliz, administrative specialist in the Enterprise Effects Division**

Born and raised in the Los Angeles area, Veliz grew up in a Hispanic household where Spanish was the only language spoken. She and her family would visit her parents’ native country of El Salvador during the summers. She is the first in her family to graduate high school, college, and is on track to add a master’s degree to the list. Since joining Aerospace in 2020 as an admin in ETG, she’s made noticeable and meaningful impact to those around her.

In her introduction, ETG manager Erin Hong noted Veliz’s positive spirit and seemingly boundless energy. In addition to her contributions on the Aerospace Women’s Committee (AWC) leadership team, Veliz also serves as the President of the Aerospace Parent and Caregiver Network (APCN) and frequently volunteers to support other ERGs and AEA groups. During the summer, Veliz volunteers with the Intern program, supporting a key role in the TECTalk Team, National Intern Day Celebration, the Intern Rocket Launch Day, and serving as an Intern Buddy. Despite her busy workload and school schedule, she always makes sure to have time with her family – her husband Dannie and her two kids, Emma and Ethan.

“Being the first in my family to do this pretty much means that, for the most part, I’ve had to do it alone and have had to learn things the hard way, every step of the way with bumps and bruises. We have many of our young employees that join us every year that come from a similar background,” Veliz said. “Not many of us have someone at home that we can talk to about [career goals and opportunities]. So, I strive to provide that support for people here at work... I see so many interns that come in that come from a similar background as myself and this is why I’m committed to helping them and others feel like they belong, like they’re welcome and help them realize how much they have to offer.”

### **Congratulations to Maben and Katy!**

# TRL Bootcamp Accelerates Commercial Innovation for Government Use

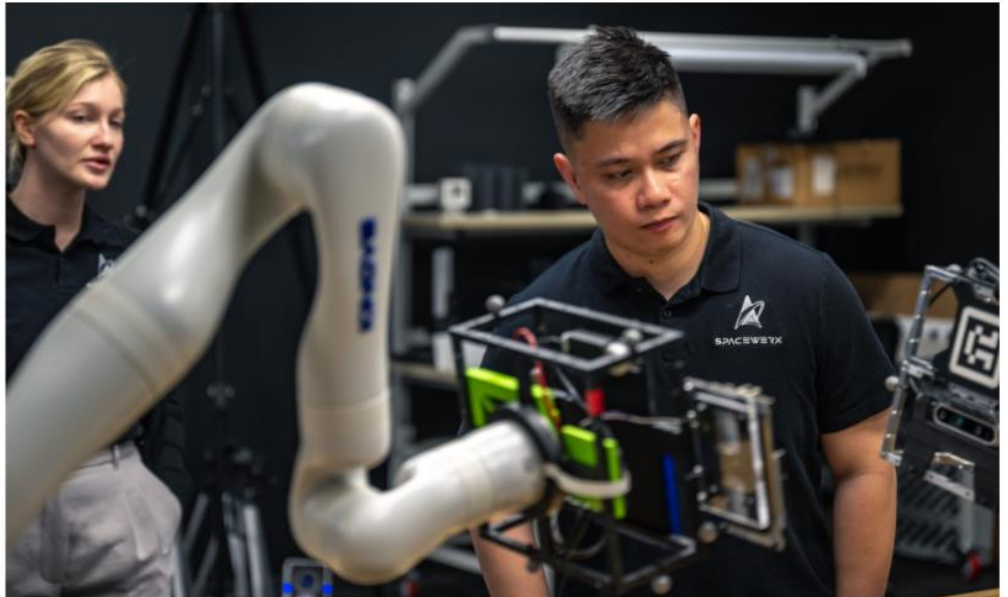
December 16, 2024

As the space industry rapidly advances, bridging the gap between commercial innovation and government mission needs has become more crucial for national security and defense. The Aerospace Corporation, in partnership with SpaceWERX—the innovation arm of the U.S. Space Force—launched a transformative program to help accelerate commercial technologies for government space missions.

The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) Bootcamp offers a structured environment that combines innovation assessment, technical guidance, and lab access. Through this collaboration, Aerospace and SpaceWERX aim to better align emerging technologies with USSF space missions. The initiative recently completed their first cohort cycle and is embarking on expanding the program into its next phase.

“Our strength as a nation is our rich industrial base and the innovation that comes out of that,” said Arthur Grijalva, director of SpaceWERX. “We make investments into ideas, mature them, and transition them into the warfighter’s hands, while also accelerating them in the commercial market. Looking to the future, we want to make sure that everything we’re building and all these investments we’re making fit well into the force design, into the architecture for the Space Force, and into what the program offices are looking to actually advance. Aerospace is tied into all those communities.”

Read the [\*full article on Aerospace.org\*](#).



Members of the SpaceWERX team take a tour of Aerospace’s Collaborative and Autonomous Vehicles Ecosystem –or CAVE– Lab, where TRL Bootcamp participants can assess and evaluate their technologies’ real-time performances. CAVE is just one of many of Aerospace’s state-of-the-art labs being utilized by the TRL Bootcamp program.

# Leveraging Commercial Space Globally

December 10, 2024



Experts from The Aerospace Corporation, allied nations and the private sector gathered recently during NATO's Commercial Space Forum to discuss a shared vision of shaping commercial collaboration for the future of space. The participants also focused on establishing a framework for NATO's first Commercial Space Strategy, which is expected to be released in 2025.

NATO is recognizing the opportunity to enhance integration of commercial and government-owned capabilities, building stronger commercial partnerships to ensure peace in Europe.

Aerospace's Commercial Space Futures (CSF) Office led a policy and strategy focused session that covered unclassified decision-making processes, policy and regulation topics. The Allied Commercial Space Tabletop Exercise (TTX) included over 10 NATO staff members in participation and 30 NATO member countries present. The exercise informed the NATO Defense Investment Division on how it can strengthen its relationship with the commercial sector.

“The exercise highlighted the desire and necessity to work with like-minded Allies and industry partners early on,” said Kara Hernandez, International Commercial Analyst in CSF. “Together, Allies can leverage the commercial sector to augment or supplant current capabilities. However, NATO and the individuals Allies must modernize and streamline some of their policies, regulations, and international cooperation agreements involving the commercial space sector to leverage the best Allied commercial sector has to offer to meet operational challenges in the future.”



From left to right: Aerospace's Kara Hernandez, Catrina Melograna and Ryan Conroy at NATO's Commercial Space Forum.

## Aerospace Experts Weigh In

As the operator of the only Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) dedicated to the space enterprise, Aerospace is uniquely positioned to provide the technical leadership, trusted partnership, and objective guidance needed to support the nation and allied space leaders in navigating the shifting commercial space landscape.

“This event has proved to be invaluable to help NATO frame their organization’s growing interest in understanding the benefits and challenges of integrating commercial space capabilities into their defense strategies,” said Ryan Conroy, Assistant Principal Director in CSF. “Furthering engagement with US stakeholders like the intelligence community, Air Force, and USSF on the importance of cooperation between government agencies and the commercial space sector.”

Aerospace produced the TTX scenario to demonstrate its ability to guide thought leadership within the international and commercial space ecosystem, helping NATO member countries understand how to transform their relationship with the commercial space sector and enhance the integration of commercial and government-owned capabilities.

CSF worked across the Aerospace enterprise including subject matter experts (SME) from Aerospace’s Center for Space Policy and Strategy (CSPS), Civil Systems Group (CSG), and Economic and Market Analysis Center (EMAC) to design the TTX scenario with various ‘moves’. These ‘moves’ leveraged Aerospace knowledge and experience with customers, informing NATO and Allies undergoing similar efforts to harness the commercial space ecosystem. The TTX scenario focused on unclassified decision-making processes, policy, and regulation topics, enabling participants to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in integrating commercial space capabilities.



SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carrying the USSF-62 Mission launches from Vandenberg Space Force Base on April 11, 2024, demonstrating years of collaboration between government and commercial partners.

## Partnering for the Future

Aerospace continues pursuing avenues to leverage commercial space throughout its government partnerships, helping the US and its allies address the hardest problems. Commercial space capabilities now hold an expanding role in future national architectures and solutions therefore utilizing partnerships with commercial space is essential for the expansion of US space leadership.

“Across the space ecosystem, we are seeing greater technological advancements and increased disruption with new launch vehicles, proliferated constellations, and computing capabilities,” said Hernandez. “It is incumbent on Aerospace to help our customers successfully navigate these exciting times, harness the promise of commercial offerings, and manage and mitigate the new risks and challenges that are emerging.”



# December 2024 Anniversaries

December 10, 2024



*In celebration and appreciation of our colleagues and their contributions, we'd like to congratulate the following employees on their milestone Aerospace anniversary this month!*

## **5 Years**

### **ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

David Macaraeg  
Seada Mohammed

### **NATIONAL SYSTEMS GROUP**

Michelle J. Carroll

## **10 Years**

### **ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

Leilani Martin

## **CIVIL SYSTEMS GROUP**

David K. McQuiggan  
Quang T. Nguyen  
Shannon Zirbel

## **CORPORATE ADMINISTRATION**

Peter J. Goepfinger

## **NATIONAL SYSTEMS GROUP**

Andrea B. Johnson  
Theodore A. Zogakis

## **15 Years**

### **ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

John H. Schilling

## **CIVIL SYSTEMS GROUP**

Dolan E. Highsmith

## **CORPORATE ADMINISTRATION**

Robert R. Vongerichten

## **20 Years**

### **ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

Sandra M. Suzuki

## **DEFENSE SYSTEMS GROUP**

Gus Bacoyanis  
Sang H. Bae

## **25 Years**

### **ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP**

Lyle S. Nojima

**CORPORATE ADMINISTRATION**

Alyssa C. Risher

**DEFENSE SYSTEMS GROUP**

Dana L. Honeycutt

**30 Years**

**DEFENSE SYSTEMS GROUP**

Peter C. Eggan

# December 2024 Obituaries

December 03, 2024

*Sincere sympathy is extended to the families of:*

**Donna Alexander**, office of technical support, hired May 5, 1970, retired Feb. 1, 1991, died Nov. 3, 2024

**Thomas Bertone**, member of technical staff, hired June 22, 1970, retired Feb. 1, 2007, died Aug. 14, 2024

**Lilton Brown**, member of technical staff, hired Feb. 26, 1979, retired Jan. 1, 2006, died Oct. 12, 2024

**Dean Cochran**, member of technical staff, hired Sept. 28, 1970, retired April 1, 1988, died Oct. 12, 2024

**Lance Diernback**, member of technical staff, hired Jan. 7, 1985, retired April 1, 2006, died Nov. 3, 2024

**Stanley Faber**, member of technical staff, hired July 2, 1982, retired Jan. 1, 1993, died Oct. 8, 2024

**Eddie Hall**, member of technical staff, hired April 14, 2008, retired April 1, 2014, died Sept. 29, 2024

**Kenneth Luey**, member of technical staff, hired June 4, 1979, retired Aug. 1, 2017, died Nov. 6, 2024

**Michael Redding**, member of technical staff, hired March 30, 1987, retired April 1, 2014, died Oct. 20, 2024

**Ronald Selden**, member of technical staff, hired Aug. 19, 1991, retired May 1, 2010, died Sept. 22, 2024

**Richard Wiggins**, member of technical staff, hired March 7, 1977, retired Feb. 1, 1994, died Oct. 12, 2024

*To notify Aerospace of a death and have it included in the Orbiter, please contact People Operations at (310) 336-5107.*

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