



Northeast Texas AFA 416

Educate, Advocate, Support, and Inspire Military Service

Our mission is to promote dominant U.S. Air & Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; to honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families; and to remember and respect our enduring Heritage.

Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure U.S. national security.

Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.

Support the total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

The chapter is part of the AFA national organization (www.afa.org), headquartered in Virginia, the Texoma Region, comprised of AFA chapters in Oklahoma and Texas, and the Texas AFA (www.texasafa.org). The Air & Space Forces Association is the voice for aerospace power and the Air & Space Forces families. We connect service members, and the total force family, through professional development, unique programs, and support initiatives before, during, and beyond their time in uniform.

Northeast Texas, Chapter 416 of the Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) is a non-profit, independent, professional military and aerospace education association that promotes public understanding of aerospace power and the pivotal role it plays in the security of the nation. Led by volunteers, we educate the public about national defense, how to support the members of our Air & Space Forces and their families and promote Aerospace Education designed to better our youth, communities, and nation. Our chapter area represents Northeast Texas from Rockwall, East to Arkansas, North to Oklahoma and south to the Athens area.

The chapter strives to positively impact communities. The chapter encourages and supports STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) activities and school education programs. We provide support for robotics, drones, solar cars, early college training, girls science programs, and more. We employ the AFA developed CyberPatriot (www.uscyberpatriot.org) and StellarXplorer (www.stellarxplorers.org) programs and provide support to schools who use them. We provide some financial, industry, and member support to school and Civil Air Patrol (Air Force Auxiliary) programs. We offer school and library grants and funding for their educational programs as well as offer student scholarships through AFA and through donor supported education efforts. View more about our programs at www.netxafa.org.

We are the **recipients of National and State awards** including the prestigious AFA Large and Texas Chapter of the Year, the National Community Partner Gold Award for excellence in partnering with our communities, and Academic Achievement Awards for our education efforts.

We need new talent and help with our programs. Use the QR Code (rt) to join. You can learn more at www.netxafa.org or contacting TX416.Northeast.President@afa.org or TX416.Northeast.Treasurer@afa.org, or calling/texting Vance Clarke, at 903-274-9981.





Congressman Keith Self



Congressman Keith Self represents the Third District of Texas in the US House of Representatives. Keith was born in a military hospital while his father was serving his Country. He grew up in Ft Worth in his early years, and then in Amarillo Texas through junior high and high school. He is a proud Tascosa Rebel!

He accepted an appointment to The United States Military Academy at West Point, graduating with a degree in Engineering and a Branch assignment in the Infantry. He graduated from both Airborne and Ranger School while at West Point. Keith and his wife Tracy married immediately after his graduation.

Keith served in the 82nd Airborne Division in his first assignment, then attended the Special Forces Qualification Course to become a Green Beret with further assignment to the forward deployed

Special Forces Battalion in Germany. There he commanded a man-portable nuclear detachment, known as an A-team.

After military schools, Keith returned to Ft Bragg for assignment for both Special Forces and the 82nd Airborne Division. Then served at the US embassy in Cairo, Egypt, the 4th Infantry Division at Ft Carson, Colorado, and a stint at the European Command in Germany. He also had duty assignments at the Pentagon and NATO Command in Belgium. Retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel, he was later called out of retirement to work for General Tommy Franks following 9/11.

Keith was deployed with the 82nd Airbourne to Grenada, patrolled with both US and British forces in Bosnia, and deployed to Afghanistan and the Arabian Gulf for Iraqi Freedom.

In 2006, Keith was elected County Judge of Collin County, serving three terms and term-limiting himself in 2018. During his twelve years, the Commissioners Court reduced taxes nearly thirty percent and reformed the retirement system.

Congressman Self was elected in 2022 for his first term in Congress and is serving his second term as your Representative for the 3rd Congressional District. He is also a member of the Veteran Affairs, Science, Space & Technology Committees and is chairman of the European subcommittee on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Keith and his wife Tracy have been happily married since his graduation from West Point. They reside in McKinney, TX and are active members of their church and local community.

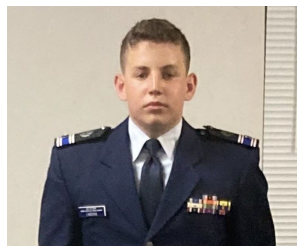


Civil Air Patrol Cadets of the Year

Each receiving \$300 Toward CAP Support



TX354 Cadet of the Year 2026: C/1st Lt Jackson Landers



C/1st Lt. Landers is the 2025 Lakeshore Composite Squadron (TX-354) nomination for AFA Cadet of the Year. At only 14 years old, he shows leadership and maturity beyond his years. From day one he has hit almost every milestone at the minimum time in grade while striving to achieve leadership positions both in the squadron and at outside activities. As a student, Cadet Landers attended 2024 Basic Encampment and 2024 Cadet Non-Commissioned Officer at CTEP. As a staff member, Cadet Landers was part of the PA Team at Group IV ALS, GSS Team for Texas Wing Summer Encampment 2025 and was a Flight Sergeant at Arkansas Wing Encampment 2025. He also served as the Lakeshore's Main Representative for the Cadet Advisory Council. Back home in our Squadron, Landers has been instrumental in keeping continuity of leadership and is an invaluable asset. He has served as Flight Sergeant, Flight Commander, and as a member of the Color Guard. His plans this summer are to gain various Ground Team Qualifications by attending the National Emergency Services Academy at Camp Atterbury, IN, and Hawk Mountain Ranger School in Kempton, PA. His current plan is to work to get appointed to the United States Air Force Academy to serve as a Combat Rescue Officer.

TX450 Cadet of the Year 2026: C/2dLt Lydia Breidenthal



The Sulphur Springs Composite squadron selects the cadet who has shown commendable growth and maturity, as our AFA Cadet of the Year. Joining in 2023, Cadet 2dLt Lydia Breidenthal has become a classic representation of CAP's Core values. Over the past year, she has shown integrity, excellence and respect to others in the way she fills all of her positions, in our squadron and staffing events around the country. In Kansas (Encampment), she served as Flight Sergeant; Basic Flight School, as Cadet Instructor; at Washington Wing Powered Flight Academy as Cadet Commander. At our squadron she reached Flight Commander. All of this while she completed her Private Pilot's License, last April, as part of Civil Air Patrol's Wings Scholarship Program. Her volunteer service met the same expectations, being present wherever her squadron served the community. Her future plans also represent the benefits of her training: she is attending LeTourneau University for a degree in Aviation Management (Homeland Security) with a minor to become a Certified Flight Instructor.

TX645 Cadet of the Year: C/TSgt Sienna Brennan



C/TSgt Sienna Brennan is currently a Flight Sergeant at TX 645. Since joining CAP in June 2025, she has distinguished herself by being Honor Cadet at Airman Leadership School, attending TX Wing Winter Encampment, and training in core competencies - Ground Team Member 3, Urban Direction Finding, Mission Staff Assistant, and Mission Radio Operator. She has completed every benchmark achievement possible during her time in CAP with Honor Credit. Throughout her short time in CAP she says she has learned numerous life skills. Looking ahead, she wants to travel to as many countries as she can before going to college, and is leaning toward engineering, business management, or marine biology. C/TSgt Brennan is the TX645 cadet of the year.



Inspire Military, Community, and National Service

Cass County Judge/Command Sergeant Major Travis Ransom

Travis Ransom has served as County Judge for Cass County Texas since May of 2022. He previously served as Mayor of the City of Atlanta, Texas, for five years. Travis is also a Commercial Insurance Agent for Offenhauser Insurance in Atlanta. Prior to joining Offenhauser, he served as a legislative aide in the Texas State Senate for eleven years. Travis is a 28-year veteran of the Army Reserve and serves as the Command Sergeant Major for the Military Intelligence Readiness Command, a division of over seven thousand soldiers.

He earned his Bachelors Degree from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He serves on the Executive Board for the ARTEX Council of Governments, is a past president and member of the Atlanta Lions Club and he also serves on the Advisory Board of the Caddo Area Council Boy Scouts of America. Travis is an Eagle Scout and father of an Eagle Scout. Travis's military awards include the Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, and numerous other campaign awards and decorations. Travis attends First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Texas with his wife Emily, and three children.



Linden, Texas

Right – Cass County Courthouse

Left – Memorial to SSgt Rucker





2026 AFA Essay Contest

Chapter 416 has annually sponsored an essay contest that provides college scholarship funds for Texas High School Seniors (including home schoolers). The contest offers students willing to do some research, provide logic and critical thinking to a topic pertaining to national security, and present it in written form, a scholarship opportunity. Top essays will be posted on our website and printed in our newsletters.

How the Contest Works: Students will produce a two-page essay, including references, along with an entry form which has specific requirements and due dates. Essays are judged and the top three essays are awarded scholarships. We often award additional \$500 scholarships provided due to the generosity of our donors.

Northeast Texas Scholarship Sponsors

1st – \$2,000 – Lt. Col. John Murray Family

2nd – \$1,500 – Dr. Jerry Ransom

3rd – \$1,000 – CMSgt Bobby & Louise McCasland Family

2026 Finalists, All Receiving Scholarships

\$500 (8), \$750 (2) and one each, \$1,000, \$1,500, & \$2000



Abigail Bautista, the daughter of Renato and Irene Bautista, is a senior at Sulphur Springs High School. She serves as Vice President of the Class of 2026 and Junior Coordinator of her school's UIL Academic Team. She also captains the UIL Spelling and Vocabulary and Current Issues and Events teams. Abigail is the current 4A UIL State Champion in Editorial Writing, a two-time State Champion team member in Spelling and Vocabulary, and a State medalist in multiple journalism competitions. She is also a member of her school's chapter of the National Honor Society and volunteers as a reading mentor for elementary students. Abigail will attend Rice University in the fall, where she plans to double major in English and Political Science to pursue a career in law or academia as a professor.



Jaycee Carol Bordelon is a senior graduating third in her class while earning her associate degree. She values faith, perseverance, and leadership, and has excelled academically and in service. Jaycee is a National Honor Society member, Regional Qualifier in UIL Feature Writing and Ready Writing, advanced to Regionals in UIL One Act Play, and is a winner for the Washington, D.C. Youth Tour. As Head Editor of her yearbook, she leads production to capture her campus spirit. She has served as a class officer, assists with school technology, and volunteers at a local daycare. In her free time, she enjoys piano, painting, writing, art, nature, video games, music, and church activities. Jaycee plans to attend Midwestern State University to pursue a BBA in business administration IT management, aiming to build a career that combines technology, leadership, and service.



Mallorie Cannon is the daughter of John and Cheryl Cannon. Mallorie is a senior at Union Grove High School where she participates on the varsity volleyball team, varsity basketball team, and varsity track team. Besides sports, Mallorie is part of the FFA Milk Quality Team, agriculture Advocacy Team, and Food Science Team, where all teams have advanced to the state level. She's also a part of the NHS. She has held many leadership positions such as secretary of her class, Union Grove FFA chapter sentinel, the NHS secretary, and captain of the volleyball and basketball teams. After graduation, she plans to attend The University of Texas at Tyler in the fall of 2026. Mallorie loves to serve in her community including helping with elementary school activities, special needs activities, helping in churches and even visiting Belize with mission work.



Riddhi Desai is the daughter of Sanjay and Rekha Desai. She is a senior at Greenville High School and is on track to graduate in the top 10 of her class. Riddhi is also part of the Early College High School program and will earn her associate degree in Allied Health this spring. She serves as Major of the Flaming Flashes drill team, senior Senior Class Representative for Student Council, and is an active member of the National Honor Society. Riddhi has been recognized as a Superintendent Scholar all four years and earned Honorable Mention and Kick Company during ADTS (American Dance/Drill Team) line camp. Outside of her school and extracurricular commitments, she enjoys creative design projects, baking, and photography. This fall, she will attend Texas A&M University, where she plans to major in Child Development and Family Sciences.



Joseph Fry is a senior at Greenville High School and an Early College student in the Applied Health program, on track to earn his Associate's Degree. He serves as captain of the varsity tennis team and is actively involved in theater as the vice-president, where he earned a UIL Best Actor award. Joseph is deeply involved in his church community, which plays a central role in his life and values. This summer, he will begin nursing school at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where he plans to pursue a career centered on compassionate care and meaningful service to others.



Kyson Herriage is a senior at Sulphur Springs High School. Following graduation, he plans to further his education at Texas A&M University, where he intends to major in Chemical Engineering and serve as a leader in the Corps of Cadets. During high school, Kyson participated in various organizations, including the Sulphur Springs High School Marching Band, which placed in the top five at the State UIL Marching Competition for the past four years. He is also a member of the VEX Robotics team that won 1st Place at the UIL State Robotics Championship in 2026. Kyson is further involved with Hopkins County Leadership, the National Honor Society, Key Club, and FCCLA. He is a leader in his church's youth group and has enjoyed serving his community at Dutch Bros Coffee since 2023. Kyson plans to continue working hard and leading others toward a brighter future.



Preston Nottingham is a senior at Sulphur Springs High School who plans to attend a United States Service Academy following graduation. Throughout high school, he has challenged himself academically by enrolling exclusively in honors, Advanced Placement, and dual credit courses. He is involved in football and track, as well as several leadership and academic organizations including Student Government, Business Professionals of America, National Honor Society, and National Technical Honor Society. In 2025, he attended Texas Boys State, where he was elected to serve on the Color Guard and the Campaign Committee. He has been recognized for his achievements in athletics as an Academic All-State Honorable Mention and All-District Honorable Mention in football. Outside the classroom, he dedicates many hours to volunteer service and works on his family's farm, Nottingham Ranch. He is currently working toward earning his private pilot's license. He is also a member of the Society of the Cincinnati Fourteen and the Sons of the American Revolution.



Mary O'Neal is a senior at Jim Bowie High school in Simms, TX. Mary Grace O'Neal is the daughter of Gregory and Dana O'Neal. She has over 40 dual credit hours with Texarkana College, and attends culinary arts classes with them as well. She went to state with both her visual art drawing and vocal solo at the First Assemblies of God Fine Arts Festival. After she graduates, she plans to finish her culinary degree.



Lucy Ransom is the oldest daughter of Travis and Emily Ransom. She attends Atlanta High School and is involved in band as the drum major, DECA - serving as chapter president, varsity cross country, varsity track, golf, National Honors Society, and dance. Some major accomplishments include completing two half marathons, racing at cross country state for four years, receiving two medals for band at state, and finishing 2nd in her class. Lucy will be attending Texas Christian University in the fall, majoring in communication sciences and disorders to pursue a career in Speech Pathology.



Julia Garcia-Ricker is the daughter of Jane Ricker and Francisco Garcia. She is a senior at Sulphur Springs High School where she is a member of both Science and Social Studies UIL. She is also a member of Keyclub, HOSA, and National Honor Society. She is a recipient of the College Board Rural and Small-Town Recognition Award. Julia plans to attend the University of Texas at Dallas in the fall to pursue a degree in biology, in hopes of becoming an Obstetrician.



Stori Shropshire is a senior at Sulphur Springs High School where she is active in academics, sports, and HOSA. She played on the varsity tennis team for the last four years and last year was a state qualifier in girls doubles. After graduation, she plans to study English at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi. In her free time she enjoys spending time with friends and family.



Zahra Tapia is the daughter of Ashfaq and Alefia Tapia. Zahra attends Paris High School and is involved in Varsity Swim, Future Problem Solving, National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, Yearbook and Lady in Waiting of the Althea Garden Club. A few major accomplishments have been competing at the FPS international conference; 2nd place in FPS Scenario writing and competing at the 4A State championship for swim. Zahra will be studying biology this fall, in hopes of becoming a doctor.



Abbey Williams is a Texas high school senior who is passionate about academics, athletics, leadership, and serving her community. She participates in varsity cross country and track, which has strengthened her discipline, perseverance, and time management skills. Abbey is also involved in marching band, where she has learned the value of teamwork, preparation, and consistency. She volunteers through Key Club and National Honor Society, where she serves as Secretary, and has also supported community events such as the Handicapable Rodeo, Night to Shine, the Sulphur Springs Work Camp, the Carter Blood Drive, and Dinner Bell. As she prepares for college, Abbey hopes to pursue a career that allows her to work with people, solve real-world problems, and make a positive impact through service and leadership.

Technical, Vocational, and College Scholarship Opportunity

In 2027, we will implement a new scholarship effort targeted at improving the national industrial base as well as to enhance local needs in our Northeast Texas area for technical skills.

North and Northeast Texas face some of the most acute skilled labor shortages in the state, driven by rapid population growth, *manufacturing expansion in DFW*, *semiconductor investments in Sherman*, logistics corridors along I-30/I-20/I-35, and a retiring trades workforce. Local reporting confirms that school districts and employers are scrambling to build pipelines for **electricians, welders, and automation technicians**.

- Aging workforce retiring faster than replacements
- Much construction and manufacturing growth in DFW, **Greenville, Sherman, Rockwall**
- Limited access to mid-skill training in rural NE Texas counties
- Sherman is becoming a **national semiconductor hub**, *pulling talent from Rockwall, Greenville, Paris, and Texarkana*.

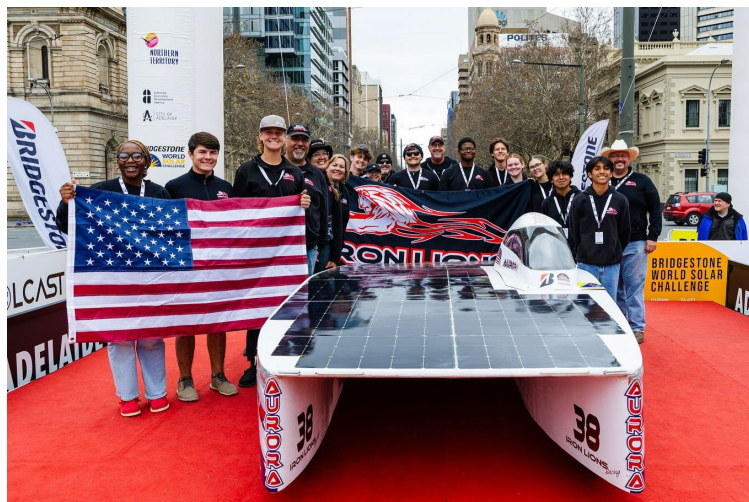
Northeast Texas AFA Chapter 416 (AFA416) is establishing scholarship opportunities to help students, military, and CAP cadets, with technical, vocational, and college training programs that help fill critical workforce needs. AFA416 will contact schools to discuss how we can partner with them on this initiative. If you are interested in helping, please contact us.



Greenville Solar Car

ABOUT US

We are the Iron Lions. We are leaders, problem solvers, designers, inventors and decision makers. As a team, we apply Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to design, build and race a road worthy solar car. We are dedicated to gaining and applying knowledge as we prepare for a Solar Car Challenge each year. Every team member fulfills different roles in Electrical, Mechanical, Logistics, Strategy or Media. We strive to be part of changing the future.



OUR GOALS

Fresh off the heels of completing in the 2025 Bridgestone World Solar Challenge we plan to participate in the 2026 Solar Car Challenge and become the number one ranked high school solar car team in the United States. The Solar Car Challenge is the top project-based STEM Initiative helping motivate students in Science, Engineering, and Alternative Energy. This year's race will be a cross country race with in the state of Texas.

HISTORY OF THE TEAM

- 2011 - The team was founded.
- 2012 - **7th place.** Classic Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2013 - **2nd place.** Classic Division Ft. Worth, TX to Los Angeles, CA.
- 2014 - **3rd place.** Classic Division. Hybrid Race Texas Motor Speedway / Ft. Worth, TX to Austin, TX.
- 2015 - **6th place.** Classic Division. Texas Motor Speedway
 - **3rd place.** Electric-Solar Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2016 - **National Champions.** Classic Division. Ft. Worth, TX to Minneapolis, MN
- 2017 - **National Champions.** Classic Division. Texas Motor Speedway
 - **National Champions.** Electric Solar Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2018 - **National Champions.** Veteran Classic Division. Ft. Worth, TX to Palmdale, CA
- 2019 - **National Champions.** Electric Solar Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2020 - Race Cancelled due to Covid-19
- 2021 - **National Champions.** Electric Solar Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2022 - **2nd place.** Advanced Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2023 - **National Champions.** Advanced Division Ft. Worth, TX to El Paso, TX
- 2024 - **2nd place** Advanced Division. Texas Motor Speedway
 - **2nd place** Advanced Classic Division. Texas Motor Speedway
- 2025- **Bridgestone World Solar Challenge** - Placed 20th, ahead of 6 college teams in the Challenger Division Australia / **Recipient of the Bridgestone E8 Award**



Scan QR or email pittsj@greenvilleisd.com for more info!



GREENVILLE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Our Mission: We equip the children of Christians with excellent academics, biblical life application, and leadership skills to excel throughout their lives.

We appreciate the support of the Northeast Texas AFA Chapter and partners TX645 Civil Air Patrol and the impact they make on our students and our rocket launch programs.

Greenville Christian School partners with Christian parents to provide a Christ-centered education taught by qualified Christian teachers. Because we serve Christian families exclusively, our school community is distinctly grounded in faith.

At Greenville Christian School, “Christian” means we believe Christ died for our sins, rose again, and lives today with the Father. Out of this belief, we follow Christ and His teachings—loving deeply, praying often, serving one another, and pursuing spiritual growth. We encourage students and families to be active in their local churches and daily discipleship. [Read our Statement of Faith online.]

Founded in 1976 by parents from many churches and denominations, GCS remains unaffiliated with any one church body. Supported primarily through tuition, we enjoy the freedom to express our faith openly and allow biblical truth to shape every part of our school.

Families can expect a close-knit, church-involved community, small classes (average 10:1), and a commitment to excellence that honors God. Our students represent more than 60 churches and 15 communities, reflecting the rich diversity of the body of Christ.

Mission Statement: The mission of Greenville Christian School is to equip the children of Christians with excellent academics, biblical life application and leadership skills to excel throughout their lives.

Vision Statement: It is our prayer and intent that students and alumni of Greenville Christian succeed in their personal and professional lives, and they influence the world through their knowledge, service, talents and resources.

If this sounds like a place your family would thrive, we’d love to meet you. Schedule a tour at office@greenvillechristian.org.

Contact Us: 8420 Jack Finney Blvd., Greenville, TX 75402 / 903-454-1111





Hughes Springs Non-Profit Library

215 E 1st St, Hughes Springs, TX 75656 / (903) 639-1332





Mandy Eckhardt – Science in the Community



Providing Free STEM Experiences for Rural Students



About Me

My name is Mandy Eckhardt, and I am currently a PhD student in Biomedical Sciences at UT Southwestern in Dallas. I attended Sulphur Springs schools until I graduated high school in 2017. Outside of my graduate studies, I volunteered with many science programs with Dallas students and quickly realized similar opportunities are unavailable to students outside city and suburban areas of the country. Since then, I remain committed to developing and executing STEM outreach programs for students in rural areas of northeast Texas.

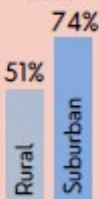
Why?

Beyond my lived experience as a small-town student who had very little opportunities to pursue science prior to college, research indicates rural youth have less access to experienced STEM teachers, advanced science courses, and STEM extracurricular activities.

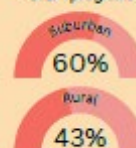


Evidence that Rural Students Face Disadvantages in STEM Education

Percent of students with access to advanced biology courses

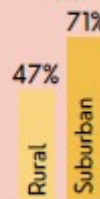


Percent of students with access to after school STEM programs



Data from Saw and Aggar, 2021, DOI:10.31020013189X27027528

Percent of students with access to advanced chemistry courses





Mandy Eckhardt – Science in the Community



How does it work?

I partner with anyone at a rural school or community interested in this program: teachers, librarians, science curriculum coordinators, and beyond. Currently, I have developed five different hands-on biology and chemistry activities that can each accommodate different age levels, time constraints, and group sizes. I start each activity with a short and engaging lesson about the science behind the activity. I spend a lot of time tailoring each lesson to the age of participating students for every event to ensure the lesson is easily understood, relevant, and exciting to each specific student audience.

Contact Us

If you are interested in learning more about, volunteering for, or donating to this program, please reach out to Vance Clarke and/or myself!

Vance Clarke:
vanceclarke1@gmail.com
(903) 274-9981

Mandy Eckhardt:
mandyeckhardt21@gmail.com
(903) 440-5069

Example Activity: DNA Extraction

In one of the biology-based activities, students learn about DNA and genetics and how they control everything about all living organisms. We also discuss why it is important for scientists to research genetics, such as developing treatments for genetic diseases, improving crop quality, and even solving crimes with DNA evidence! Then students get to extract DNA from strawberries using a process very similar to how a research scientist would extract DNA in a lab. Students get to take home their extracted DNA in a small vial to always remember their fun biology experiment!





Teacher of the Year

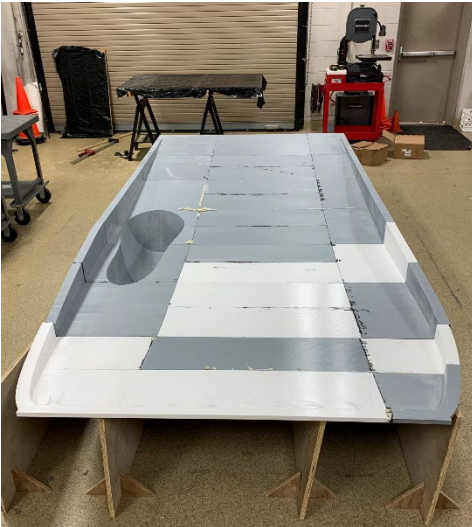
Receiving \$500, Mementos, and Competing at AFA Texas

Chapter 416; Selects Joel Pitts as its 2026 Teacher of the Year

Mr. Joel Pitts, teacher for 20 years, at the Greenville Early College High School, has been a proven performer who takes students from the beginning to a successful end. Joel prepares his students for the future and does it by giving them the tools to build a foundation that drives success. His quiet leadership, knack for inspiring students, and supporting them as needed has been a proven formula for educational success. AFA416 has worked with Joel for many years. He was one of our runner-up teachers in 2019 but in 2026 he is our Teacher of the Year.

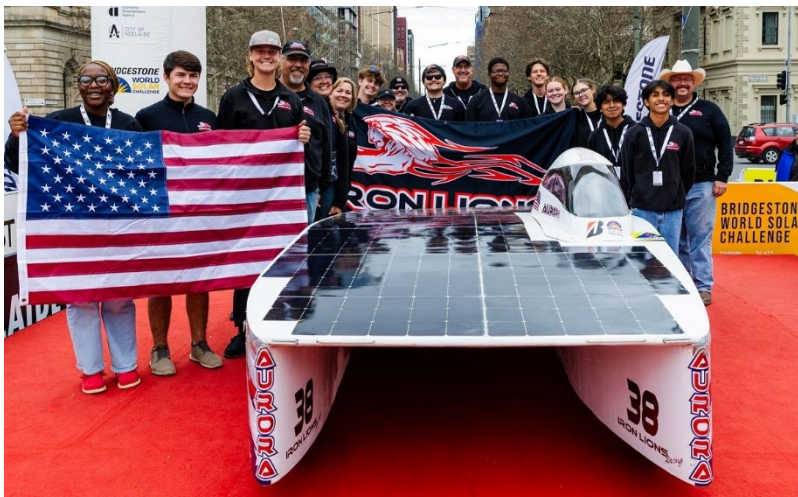


Tremendous Educator



Joel is a veteran who served his nation and continues to do so by pouring back into students to ensure we are able to build a strong industrial base, leading to a strong national defense. He does this by teaching engineering that the high school. Students are provided with dual credit along with career-based certifications with numerous STEM-based careers influenced by this training. Joel takes students through Principles of Engineering, Engineering Design, Engineering Science, and Manufacturing Engineering Technology. The form in photo on left shows the initial forming of the 2025 Solar Car he led students to manufacture. The hands-on training, weekends, and late nights, produced a car that took the students to Australia to race in the Bridgestone World Solar Car Challenge. Building the foundation for success starts with the forming, and Joel does that well!

Easy Selection for Teacher of the Year!



Joel Pitts formed his students, along with their solar car, into a machine to be reckoned with. Using the engineering principles and application, the students took his teaching and turned it into a reality. “No other high school has ever competed in the World Solar Car Challenge,” said Pitts, “but we built a car, raised funds – some given by AFA416 – and travelled to Australia to compete.” This type of innovation, drive, and push to break boundaries are what set

Joel apart from many other teachers. He is able to see pathways for his students and leads them with foundational teaching and guidance. He is so worthy of recognition!

Selecting Mr. Joel Pitts as our Teacher of the Year was easy. His continued work to excel across continents shows how he cares for students, community, and our nation!



Community Partner Recognition – AFA Texas Medal of Freedom

Bob and Gloria Jordan – Office Solutions, Greenville, TX

The Texas Air & Space Forces Association "Medal of Freedom" is awarded to Bob and Gloria Jordan, Owners and Operators of Office Solutions in Greenville Texas. The Jordans have been involved in our Chapter as supporters and Community Partners for twenty 20+ years. Each and every year they support our annual "Golf Thing Fundraiser" with Sponsor Signs and Goody Bag material for one hundred and twenty 120 contestants. When I visit their office, they always are ready to hear about all the good things our Chapter is involved in and impact we are making. We have had to utilize them on several occasions for their expertise in shipping and FED-X issues, many times in last minute situations, and they drop whatever they are doing to make us a priority. On a recent visit to collect annual membership dues Gloria was helping a customer and while assisting the Gentleman she said, "I want to introduce you to Terry Thomas with the Air & Space Forces Association!" She went on to say what a great organization we were and how much we were giving back to the community. She continued saying, "I know how involved you are in the Community and I'll bet Terry can get you signed up!" Bob, a retired U.S Navy Master Chief, is also a great supporter of the chapter, always telling me "Navy is number 1 but I like you Air Force guys, you do good things." Bob & Gloria Jordan are outstanding supporters and partners, and we present them the AFA Texas "Medal of Freedom."

Butch Mitchell – Coker Mathews Funeral Home, Greenville, TX

The Texas Air & Space Forces Medal of Freedom is awarded to Butch Mitchell. Butch has been a steady supporter of our Chapter and AFA for nearly 20-years. Butch is the Owner & President of Coker Mathews Funeral home in Greenville, Texas. This is one of those unique partners who always welcomes you when you visit even though he knows you have an invoice in hand! He honestly relishes the visits and is always anxious to hear updates and talk about the Chapter and its health, initiatives, and impact. Most importantly he takes great pride in serving the community and especially our Veterans and Community Partners. He takes veteran family losses personally and helps them through the most difficult decisions. We recently lost a longtime Community Partner, and he called me to ask if we (AFA) wanted to do anything special for this partner or his family. Generous, compassionate, and caring; Butch is a gentleman you can trust! We are indeed honored to be partnering with Butch Mitchell and present him with the AFA Texas "Medal of Freedom."

Rhonda Hinchey – Best Western Plus, Greenville, TX

We are very proud to submit to Ms. Rhonda Hinchey for the prestigious award of the Texas Air & Space Forces Medal of Freedom. Rhonda is the General Manager of the Best Western Plus in Greenville, Texas. She is totally responsible for insuring a seventeen (17) consecutive year record as a Community Partner despite having to deal with three (3) new Owners since her appointment as General Manager of this Property. Each time she has had to convince these new Owners of the "Return On Investment" with the Air & Space Forces Association. She continually provides discounts for us anytime we ask and provides rates normally not advertised to the public. We have used the Best Western Meeting and Hospitality rooms on several occasions to host state meetings, and these too were offered at substantially lower rates. On two (2) occasions they were provided at no cost for special dignitaries we had on site for chapter events. A big supporter who prominently displays her Community Partner plaques proudly in the main Lobby of the hotel. Rhonda is most deserving of this special recognition. We are pleased to present her with the AFA Texas Medal of Freedom.

Debbie Sickels - Insurance Group of North Texas

Ms. Debbie Sickels. Debbie has been a staunch supporter and Community Partner of Northeast Texas Chapter 416 for over 20 years! She proudly exhibits her three (3) Air & Space Forces Plaques in immediate sight when you enter her business. She is one of our best marketing partners always showing off her plaques and telling her Insurance Clients about all the fantastic work Chapter 416 does to Educate, Advocate, Support, and Inspire Military Service, in the community. She is responsible for signing up her landlord as a Community Partner through her inspiration! For twenty-plus (20+) consecutive years she formed a team of six (6) women to play in our annual "Golf Thing Fund Raiser," other Teams always say those women have more fun than any of the twenty Teams participating in the Event! Every year she provides Goody Bag items for one hundred and twenty participants, plus purchased Hole Sponsor Signs at both courses, and comes to play! On top of this, when we start policing up Silent Auction Cards at the Auction we constantly see "Debbie Sickels" applying bids for many of the items to further support or efforts. Our Chapter is very fortunate to have a Community Partner & AFA Member who truly grasps what our mission is and supports it so well! Debbie is not bashful about promoting our activities and sharing the joy she gets from participating and giving. It gives us much pleasure and satisfaction to recognize this outstanding Community Partner and friend of Air & Space Forces Association Chapter 416. Ms. Debbie Sickels is very deserving the special recognition a Texas Medal of Freedom provides!



What Is AFA?

The Air & Space Forces Association is an independent, non-profit association that has been serving Airmen, Guardians, and their Families since 1946.

Our mission is to promote dominant U.S. Air and Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; to honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families; and to remember and respect our enduring Heritage.

Whether your background is military or civilian, journalism or policy, education or engineering—AFA's mission has a role for you.

350,000+ members. One mission.

Mission Membership is AFA's **free membership tier** for Airmen, Guardians, government civilians, military families, industry innovators, and anyone else with a passion for American airpower, spacepower, and national defense.

Joining is the easiest way to stay informed and connected to the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force through news, live events, and a worldwide community at **no cost**.

Make An Impact

Impact your world, nationally and in your community by joining AFA.

As a member, you are aiding in advocating and supporting your Airmen & Guardians.

Your membership also supports Northeast Texas Chapter 416.

The only thing better is if you came out and stood with us and provided direct support in our community! We need your help!



Join for FREE at: www.afa.org/join

Be sure to associate with **Chapter 416!**