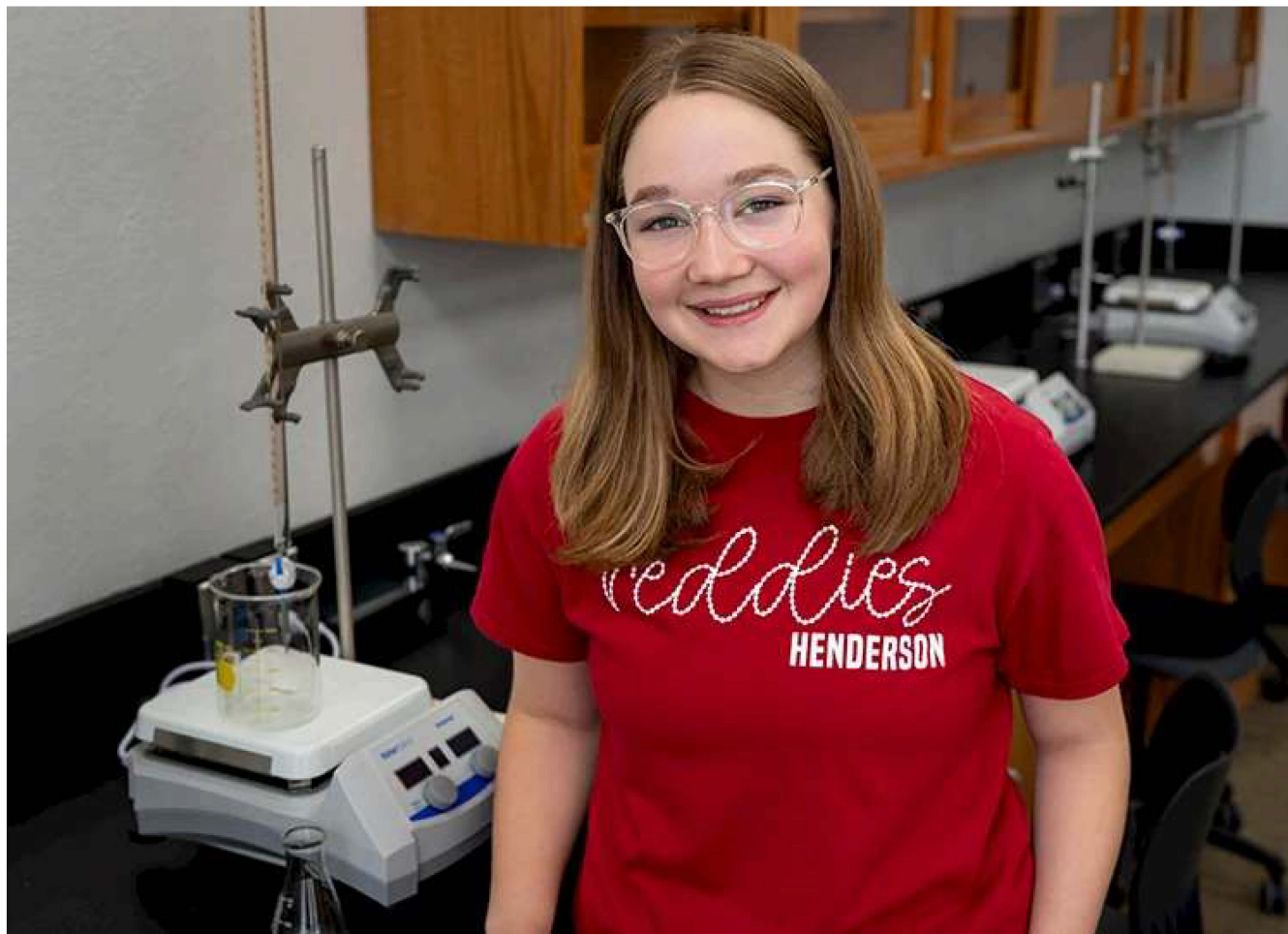


Henderson State announces first recipient of Caver-Hudson Aspirnaut STEM Award



Heather Buffalo is the first recipient of the award

Henderson State University has named Heather Buffalo, a sophomore engineering major from Glenwood, Arkansas, as the first recipient of the prestigious Caver-Hudson Aspirnaut™ STEM Award, a transformative opportunity designed to expand student engagement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

The Caver-Hudson Aspirnaut™ STEM Award was established through a partnership between Henderson State University Caver College of Aviation, Science, and Nursing, and the Aspirnaut™ program at Vanderbilt University Medical Center by Dr. Troy Caver and Dr. Billy Hudson, both distinguished Henderson alumni from the Class of 1962. Rooted in a friendship that began on the Henderson campus, Caver and Hudson share a lifelong commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and expanding opportunities for students pursuing STEM careers.

Funded through the generosity of Caver, the award provides selected students with the opportunity to participate in a prestigious internship experience at Vanderbilt University Medical Center — opening doors to advanced research, mentorship, and professional development.

Buffalo, who is pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering with a minor in physics, has distinguished herself as a leader both inside and outside the classroom. She helped establish Henderson's Women in STEM student organization, is an active member of the Society of Physics Students and works on campus in Information Technology.

"I am beyond honored to be the first recipient of the Caver-Hudson Aspirnaut™ STEM Award," Buffalo said. "When I received the news that I was awarded the internship, I couldn't stop smiling for the rest of the day. I remember how nerve wracking and exciting it was to get to speak with Dr. Caver and Dr. Hudson about the internship in January.

"The nerves were all for nought because they were so kind and welcoming to any questions that I had. It was one of the most inspiring conversations I've had in a long time."

Buffalo noted the encouragement she received from Dr. Shannon Clardy, dean of the Caver College of Aviation, Science, and Nursing at Henderson.

"Dr. Clardy was the one to tell me about the Aspirnaut™ internship, so I am extremely thankful for her. She's been one of my biggest supporters since I made my first schedule with her at Heart Start.

"Henderson's engineering department has done an incredible job thus far preparing me for the field, and I can't wait to get my first look at it. Of course, none of this would happen without Dr. Caver, Dr. Hudson, and the support from the university as a whole. I am getting to achieve one of my childhood dreams because of their dedication to science and the individual.

"This award represents the very best of what Henderson State stands for — opportunity, innovation, and student success," said Henderson State Chancellor Dr. Trey Berry. "Heather Buffalo has already demonstrated exceptional talent, leadership, and determination in her academic journey.

"We are incredibly proud of her achievement and grateful to Dr. Caver and Dr. Hudson for creating a pathway that will empower our students to pursue meaningful careers in STEM and make a lasting impact on the world."

The award is closely tied to the nationally recognized Aspirnaut™ program founded in 2006 by Hudson, his wife Dr. Julie Hudson, and his siblings, Johnny Hudson and Ann Kincl, also Henderson Distinguished Alumni. The program's Summer Research Internship, launched in 2009 at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, offers undergraduate students a highly competitive, residential research experience.

Designed to increase participation and success in STEM — particularly among students from rural backgrounds — the Aspirnaut™ Program is a ten-week summer internship providing hands-on, mentored laboratory research alongside leading scientists. Aspirnaut's holistic approach provides participants with a fulltime research experience on biomedical topics, including renal biology and disease, while also developing critical professional and communication skills and wellness training.

Students live on Vanderbilt's campus and work within a world-class academic and healthcare environment, culminating in formal presentations of their research through abstracts, oral presentations, and poster sessions. Supported by the National Institutes of Health, the program has established a strong national reputation for preparing students for advanced study and impactful careers in STEM fields.

The Aspirnaut™ K20 STEM pipeline has deep roots in Arkansas, where Dr. Hudson grew up.

"Aspirnaut's goal is to increase STEM achievement and increase the number of students entering the STEM workforce. More than 80 of the program's 400 summer participants over the past 18 years are from Arkansas. Nearly 70 percent of these students have gone on to pursue advanced degrees in STEM fields or entered the STEM workforce," Hudson said.

“The Caver-Hudson Aspinaut™ STEM Award reflects Henderson State’s ongoing commitment to connecting students with high-impact learning experiences and illustrates the powerful role alumni play in shaping the future of Reddies,” said Josh Kee, vice-chancellor of Advancement. “Henderson extends its sincere gratitude to Dr. Caver and Dr. Hudson for their vision, generosity, and dedication to student success.”

Students interested in applying for the Caver-Hudson Aspinaut™ STEM Award are encouraged to contact Dr. Shannon Clardy, dean of the Caver College of Aviation, Science, and Nursing, at clardys@hsu.edu for additional information.

Categories



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