

On the cutting edge

Week of events puts regional technology in spotlight

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LOS ANGELES - Former astronaut Sally Ride can still remember the thrill of rocketing skyward and seeing Earth from outer space.

"It was an unbelievable experience," recalls the 56-year-old San Diego resident, America's first woman in space. "I still can't believe it to this day. It's incredible to be able to look at Earth from the outside and see it as a planet. It really made me aware of the fragility of our planet and how we depend upon it for everything."

Ride's enthusiasm for science and technology was contagious Monday as she arrived at the Marriott hotel in Los Angeles to kick off the fifth annual

Los Angeles County Technology Week.

Tech Week events are designed to inform those with an interest in technology about the state of the technology landscape in L.A. County.

The events target businesses that develop or employ technologies, as well

as developers, entrepreneurs, investors, venture capitalists, teachers and students.

Ride, a keynote speaker, presented several awards on Monday including the Process Innovation Award, which went to Monrovia-based AeroVironment Inc., a company that develops unmanned surveillance planes and fast-charge systems for electric, industrial vehicle batteries.

The Education and Workforce Development Award was given to Wendie Johnston, director of the L.A./Orange County Biotech Center at Pasadena City College. The Product Innovation Award went to Goldstar, a Pasadena-based business that sells tickets to a wide variety of live entertainment events.

AeroVironment's award was given in recognition of the company's Clean Energy Technology Center.

"This is a big acknowledgment of our commitment to technology and innovation," said Paul Glenney, the center's director. "We pride ourselves on developing new technologies that end up in game-changing business." AV's Clean Energy Technology Center works in the development of renewable energy, ranging from wind power to solar power to fast-charge battery technologies.

Johnston was recognized for her work in helping to promote a greater awareness of job opportunities in biotechnology. A primary goal of the L.A./Orange County Biotech Center at Pasadena City College is to funnel more students into biotech careers.

"I think high school students don't really see this," Johnston said recently. "They think, 'Oh, I could go to medical school,' and that's it. We're trying to show them that there are many other things to do in science."

The biotech center serves 28 community colleges in work force development for the biotech industry. It does this through K-12 outreach; connecting with industry to get internships and assistance in curriculum development; networking with economic development agencies; and working with universities to develop career pathways and disseminating this knowledge to the regional colleges in a timely manner.

Goldstar CEO Jim McCarthy was on hand Monday to receive the company's Product Innovation Award.

"This is an honor and a thrill for us," he said. "We're very excited."

Goldstar has affiliations with about 2,000 entertainment venues. When someone becomes a member of Goldstar, they tell the company what kinds of events they're interested in and where they like to go.

Goldstar, in turn, tells them about upcoming events that match their personal preferences. Members get a weekly e-mail summary of events,

and if they also sign up for e-mail alerts, they get late-breaking event offers tailored to them.

"We work with venues to promote their shows, and 90percent of the tickets we sell are about half price or even less," McCarthy said. "We're actually creating demand for shows that people otherwise might not have been interested in."

Ride was selected for astronaut training in 1978 and flew in space twice. Her first flight was aboard the space shuttle Challenger in 1983. During the flight, the five-member crew deployed communications satellites, performed the first satellite deployment and retrieval with the shuttle's robot arm and conducted pharmaceutical research.

Ride's second eight-day

mission was also aboard Challenger. The crew deployed the Earth Radiation Budget satellite, conducted scientific observations of the Earth and demonstrated the potential for satellite refueling by astronauts.

In 2001, Ride founded her own company, Sally Ride Science, to pursue her passion for motivating girls and young women to pursue careers in science, math and technology. The company creates entertaining science programs and publications for upper elementary and middle-school students and their parents and teachers.

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