

Small Business of the Year Nominee

Name of Business: Delaware Aerospace Education Foundation

Address: 585 Big Oak Road, Smyrna, DE 19977

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Describe the business:

Mission/Philosophy: DASEF's mission is to inspire and educate the people of Delaware in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), using the fundamental connection between Earth Systems and technology to understand our planet and its place in the universe.

Primary good or service provided: In this place, the science and technology-of Earth and space are linked with the youth, educators, and the public. DASEF's tools include its annual destination academies at the Outpost and the University of Delaware, field trips, student and teacher workshops, presentations, symposiums, and professional development programs. We have our primary facility at the 39-acre DASEF educational complex in Kent County, DE.

Number of years in business: 31

How did your business start?

In 1985, Dr. Stephanie Wright won one of two Delaware slots and was a semi-finalist in President Reagan's National Teacher-in-Space program. After witnessing the tragedy of the Challenger disaster in 1986, she resolved to help children understand that good can come from any situation. She eventually provided school science presentations throughout the state. In 1989, she began thinking and talking about expanding this program and got support from some local teachers who were interested in the idea of an independent facility dedicated to providing this kind of education as a supplement to what was happening in the local schools. On Feb. 7, 1990, DASEF was born.

Number of employees: Full-time – 0; Part-time – 9

Describe the growth of your business:

In this kind of business, growth is not measured by an increase in staff or an increase in revenue earned. Instead, growth is determined by the number of people who are touched by our services – and that number continues to rise. In 2007, we reached just over 3,000 students per year. Currently, we reach approximately 25,000 students per year. For us, that is MAJOR growth and incredible success.

Describe the challenges facing your business:

DASEF's biggest challenge overall is that so many people are unaware of what DASEF has and what we can do – after 31 years, many still don't know we're here. We are an innovative and progressive organization. We're always on the move... and we simply don't have time to always show off the amazing things that are happening here. We do not want to be Kent County's "best kept secret." We want to touch as many as possible with our message and the experiences we offer. We need people to spread the amazing word about what happens here! We all have a stake in preparing our youth of today for a bright competitive tomorrow – that makes it imperative that people find out about us and take advantage of all we have to offer.

Describe solutions developed to address those challenges:

We continue to build our network by partnering with others. We have a fantastic partnership with the University of Delaware, our area libraries, the school districts, youth programs, the Civil Air Patrol, area ROTC chapters, and the like. As we work together, they become our ambassadors to share our story.

We work as hard as we can to host events that bring people, children and adults alike, to our campus. We know that once they come, they will come again – and they're likely to bring friends.

Describe a creative, imaginative or innovative process you have developed that has helped your business grow:

Innovation and creativity are part of the fabric of DASEF. Being a non-profit organization and working with such a small staff almost forces us to think outside the box all the time. So many of our programs and projects have come from innovative ideas. If I have to lift up just one, it would be our summer academies.

The Delaware Aerospace Destination Academy provides hands-on training and experiences to young “cadets” in aerospace-related activities and fields. Held in late June and early July, over 6,200 graduates in grades 1 – 10 are continually challenged to think, design, solve, build, and work cooperatively. All academies are designed to integrate the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics using Earth and Space themes as the unifying framework. Hands-on activities and many opportunities for problem solving in small teams are included in each type of academy. These academies have enabled us to increase our footprint in Delaware in a big way.

What are the goals for your business in the next three to five years?

In addition to maintaining our robust schedule of educational events, both on site and on the road, we would really like to concentrate our efforts on completing the Innovation Technology Exploration Center (ITEC). Currently a completed shell, this 40,500 square foot facility will one day house 14 classrooms, amazing changeable displays, and overnight accommodations all constructed for the purpose of giving students of all ages experiences in which they can learn how Earth's systems interact with technology, while protecting the Earth.

The hurdle standing between the current ITEC shell and completion is funding. To date, DASEF has no debt. Funded by grants from NASA, the State of Delaware, businesses, non-profits, a 99-year leased land donation from Kent County Levy Court and individual donors, DASEF has invested millions in its facilities and programs. We are hoping to launch a “Wisdom Begins with Wonder” Initiative starting soon to help raise the needed \$5,250,000 to complete the project.

What distinguishes your business from the others?

There is no other business like DASEF in the state... or maybe anywhere. From our galaxy garden (one of 3 on the planet) to our summer space academies to our collective experience and expertise, we are unique in every way.

What contributions have you made in the community?**Serving on boards/committees:**

- Aerospace State Association – Education Committee – Dr. Wright, Vice-Chair;
- DASEF serves as the K-12 Outreach Coordinator for both the University of Delaware's NASA Space Grant and Delaware State University's NASA URC Center for Applied Optics for Space Science;
- Dr. Wright completed serving a 3-year term as the District III Director for National Science Teachers Association.

Providing in-kind services:

- DASEF offers FREE Professional Development for Teachers;

- All Outdoor Exhibits at the Outpost (Galaxy Garden, Charles Parks Statue, Whisper Seats, Solar and Marsh Walkways, etc.) are FREE and open to the public;
- DASEF provides a Rocketry Program for Military Kids through 4 – H in Dover.

Awards & Recognitions:

Dr. Wright has been recognized by Aerospace States Association, Air Force Association, American Institute of Astronautics and Aeronautics, Civil Air Patrol, Central Economic Development Office, Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame, Delaware Astronomical Society, Dover Air Force Base as a Distinguished Citizen, Girl's Inc., Rotary International as a Paul Harris Fellow, University of Delaware, Women in Aerospace and the YWCA.