The Aero Club of Northern California
2025 Crystal Eagle



Presented to

Bonny Simi



Bonny Simi

Bonny Simi is a pioneering force in aviation, technology, and leadership. As Head of Air Operations and People at Joby Aviation, she is helping to shape the future of flight through the development and launch of all-electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft. In this role, she oversees the company's air carrier certification, flight operations, maintenance, training, safety, and sustainability efforts—while also leading the People function, drawing on her deep expertise in both operations and human capital management.

Bonny's aviation journey spans more than three decades. She began her flying career as a pilot for United Airlines and later joined JetBlue Airways, where she flew Boeing, Airbus, and Embraer aircraft. At JetBlue, she rose through the ranks to hold senior leadership roles across Flight Operations, System Operations, Airports, Customer Support, and People. Most notably, she founded and served as President of JetBlue Technology Ventures, the airline's Silicon Valley-based venture capital arm, where she championed innovation at the intersection of travel and technology.

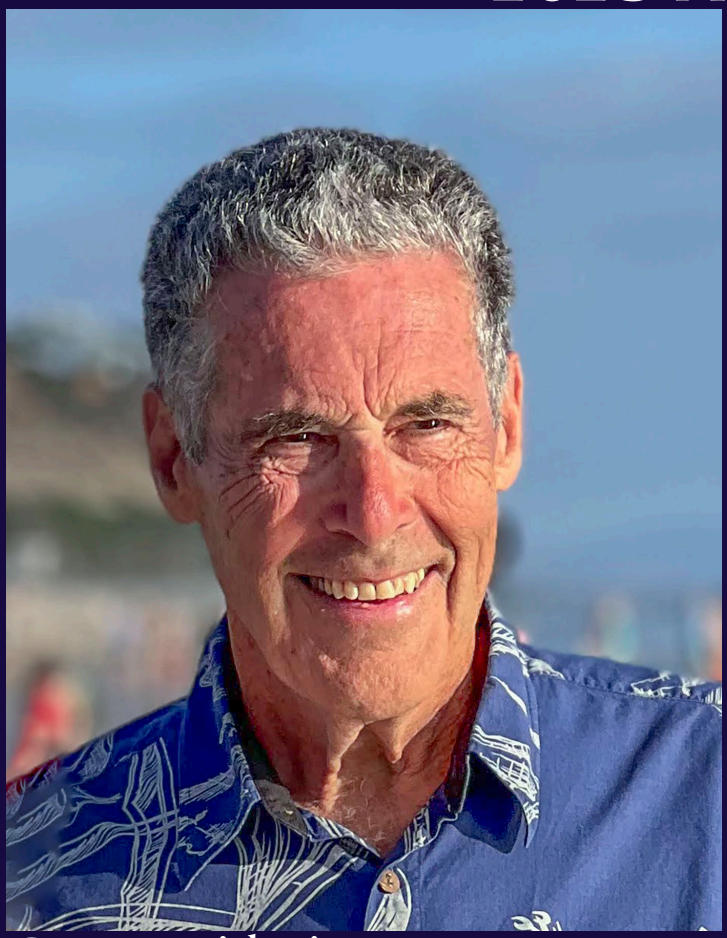
Her leadership extends far beyond the cockpit. Bonny is a three-time Olympian in the sport of luge, representing the United States in the 1984, 1988, and 1992 Winter Games. She later became an Emmy-nominated sports reporter and commentator, covering Olympic and international events for major networks. Her diverse career reflects a relentless drive to break barriers and redefine what's possible.

Bonny is also a passionate advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in aviation. She has spoken widely about the importance of mentorship, early exposure to aviation careers, and reducing financial barriers for aspiring pilots. Her efforts have inspired countless individuals—especially women and underrepresented groups—to pursue careers in aerospace and technology.

She currently serves on the board of Pebblebrook Hotel Trust and advises several startups in the travel and hospitality sectors. Bonny holds degrees in communications, broadcast journalism, and engineering, and she is a graduate of Stanford University and the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Tonight, we honor Bonny Simi with the Crystal Eagle Award for her extraordinary contributions to aviation, her visionary leadership in emerging technologies, and her unwavering commitment to opening doors for the next generation of aerospace pioneers.

National Aero Club Association
2025 Awardee



Gerry Fairbairn

Gerry's aviation career began when he started reading Flying magazine in his junior high library. He searched out a local airport and would ride his bike there on a regular basis to help pilots wash their airplanes in exchange for rides, and then started an airplane waxing business to earn money for flying lessons.

He started at San Jose State the first year the Aviation Department buildings opened on the San Jose airport. While pursuing his degree he continued to fly and became a flight instructor during his junior year. he loved flight instructing and over the next two years accumulated 3,000 hours of flight time.

Gerry enlisted in the Air Force, and due to the strong background provided by the Aeronautics degree, he was able to work as a project engineer, and was part of a team that established the Eglin Air Force base aero club. He left the Air Force to pursue a masters degree in business at San Diego State University. Gerry was then recruited by the San Jose State University aviation program. There he taught flight related courses, but started turning more of his attention to aviation management related courses. He found that students were bored with textbook approaches so in the late 1970's started developing computer based management simulations, and continued that approach throughout his teaching career. He kept flight instructing, acting as advisor to the Flying Twenty, and coaching the intercollegiate flight team. He was also able to pursue an advanced degree, and in 1984 was awarded a Ph.D. in Economics from Santa Clara University.

In 1987 he was awarded a sabbatical to develop a multiuser airline simulation for use in the classroom, and also to gain experience in a truly unique flight program at Daniel Webster College. Although he originally intended to return to San Jose, he was offered the position of Academic Vice President and decided it was a great opportunity to develop management experience. After 4 years it became apparent that he loved teaching and developing educational programs more than administration and returned to the classroom. This also allowed him to work on two programs that were focused directly on aviation. He started the University Aviation Association "Aviation Policy Seminar" in 1992 which brought students from aviation programs across the country together to talk with government organizations, Congressional representatives, and industry association leaders about how they interacted in establishing aviation policy. This has been a successful program that is still being conducted today.

He also worked with a group of aviation educators to establish the first aviation academic accreditation organization. He was the first chair of the Council on Aviation Accreditation (CAA), and subsequently chaired several of the key committees. The name of the organization has now become the Aviation Accreditation Board International to more clearly reflect its role.

His final years in aviation education were spent as aviation department chair and professor at Westminster College in Utah.



James M. Nissen Scholarship

James (Jim) M. Nissen (1915-1994)was born in Livermore, CA. In 1937, after receiving his engineering degree at the University of CA at Berkely, he was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Navy, and later became a naval aviator and flew various military aircraft including te PBY Catalina. He briefly flew trans-pacific sea-planes for Pan American Airways before accepting a research test pilot position in 1941 with Ames Research Center at Moffett Field, know as National Advisory Committee on Aviation (NACA), now NASA. In 1945 he joined North American Aviation as a test pilot. At the same time, with two partners, he founded an aviation company and developed 16.4 acres of land leased from the city of San Jose, creating a small airport. In 1946 he sold his share of the business and was hired by the city of San Jose as its first Airport Manager. Over the next 29 years (1946-1975) he developed the small airfield into the Bay Area's third major jetport -Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC). At the time of his retirement as Director of Aviation, SJC had achieved national status with service to every major U.S. destination city, including non-stop flights coast-to-coast and service to Hawaii. The airport at the time was also home to more than 600 general aviation and corporate aircraft. The $1.3 billion dollar Terminal B at SJC, which opened in 2010, is named the James M. Nissen Terminal Complex. Mr. Nissen was a past member of the Aero Club Board of Directors. This endowed scholarship was funded by a contribution fom Sallie (Nisssen) Moran.

Ethan Tavares is a senior Aviation – Professional Flight major at San José State University whose dedication to aviation is matched by his leadership and perseverance. A first-generation pilot, Ethan began flight training at age 16 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite early challenges, he earned his Private Pilot Certificate in July 2024 and his Instrument Rating in August 2025. He is now preparing to begin his Commercial Pilot License training.

Ethan transferred to SJSU from West Valley and Mission Community Colleges, where he earned Dean's List honors and the West Valley Scholarship of Engineering. At SJSU, he was awarded the David B.A. Bell Memorial Aviation Scholarship and currently serves as President of Alpha Eta Rho, a nationally recognized professional aviation fraternity. In this role, he organizes career panels, airport events, and community service initiatives, fostering a strong and inclusive aviation community on campus.



Balancing full-time school, flight training, and three part-time jobs—including roles at a car dealership, Sonoma Raceway, and Levi's Stadium—Ethan finances his education alongside his parents, splitting costs to pursue his dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot. He credits his mentor, a SkyWest captain soon joining American Airlines, for helping him stay focused and motivated.

This scholarship will ease the financial burden of flight training and allow Ethan to continue progressing toward his ATP certification. His long-term goal is to fly for a major airline and eventually give back by mentoring future aviators and funding scholarships for aspiring pilots.



Robert L. Hamilton Scholarship

Robert (Bob) L. Hamilton (1936-2002) was born in Hanford CA. In 1954 he joined the United States Army and was initially trained in helicopter maintenance. After a tour in Germany, he was accepted in the Army helicopter pilot program and followed his training served two tours in Vietnam as a rescue helicopter pilot. He was awarded the prestigious Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Bronze Stars, and 30 Air Medals, In 1986, he was inducted in the Army Avation Hall of Fame at Fort Rucker, Alabama. While most of his 6,300 flight hours were in helicopters, he also piloted fixed-wing aircraft and flew professionally for several companies in the San Jose area. Many of his flight-hours were in the large twin-rotor Chinook CH-47 - the first helicopter to utilize fly-by-wire flight controls systems. Mr. Hamilton was a past officer and member of the Aero Club Board of Directors. Funds for this scholarship were donated by a very close friend of the Hamilton family at the time of Mr. Hamilton's death.

Anthony Duran is a passionate aviation student at San José State University, pursuing a degree in Aviation with a concentration in Professional Flight. His journey began at age 13 with a flight in a small aircraft, sparking a lifelong commitment to becoming a commercial airline pilot.

Anthony earned his Private Pilot Certificate at 17 through the Ray Aviation Foundation Scholarship and recently completed his Instrument Rating. He is now working toward his Commercial Certificate and is one of only three SJSU students selected for the Horizon Air Pilot Development Program.

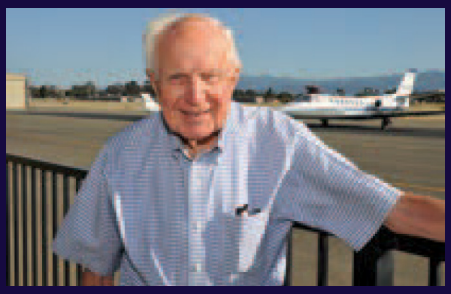
His leadership and service reflect his dedication to aviation and community. As Vice President of Alpha Eta Rho, Anthony helped revitalize the organization's outreach and professionalism. He competes with the SJSU Precision Flight Team, placing first in Aircraft Identification and sixth in the Region 2 NIFA competition.



He also volunteers in the university's Simulation Lab and leads youth outreach through EAA Chapter 1541, where he built immersive flight simulators to mentor young aviators and promote diversity.

Raised in a single-parent household, Anthony has overcome significant personal challenges, including a difficult family past and a serious leg injury. He continues to support his mother and younger brother while balancing flight training, academics, and part-time work.

This scholarship will help Anthony advance his training and ease financial strain, allowing him to focus on becoming a skilled, compassionate pilot. His goal is to connect people and communities through aviation, just as flight once connected his own family.



Thomas E. Leonard Scholarship

Thomas (Tom) E. Leonard (1922-2016) was born in San Francisco, CA. Tom attended California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo. But the onset of WW2 interrupted his college educaiton. During the war years, Tom worked for Pan Am at Treasure Island and served in the U.S. Army Air Corps. After the Was, Tom returned to Cal Poly and completed his degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Although he intended to rejoin Pan Am after graduation in 1946, Tom accepted an invitation to teach for on year at San Jose State College. He soon discovered that he loved teaching and his one-year commitment ended up lasting more than four decades. By 1950, he had become the Department Chairman of the Aeronautics program. He developed the first four-year college-level aeronautics program at San Jose State, secured an FAA Air Agency Certificate authorizing the college to operate an approved Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) program in 1954 and completed his Master's degree in Education in 1956. As the school curriculum expanded, so did the facilities. He successfully negotiated a 50-year land lease to build a state-of-the-art off-campus facility on San Jose Airport. The new on-airport facility was complete in 1962 and became the flagship aviation program in California. By the 1980's, enrollment exceeded 800 students majoring in aircraft maintenance, flight operations and administration. Tom retired form SJSU in 1985, but continued to teach part-time until 1994. Mr. Leonard was a past president and long-time member of the Aero Club Board of Directors. Funds for this scholarship have been contributed by many of the thousands whose lives were touched by this unique man.

Emma Johnson



Emma Johnson is a standout Aviation Management student at San José State University whose passion for airport operations and commitment to community engagement have defined her collegiate journey. A three-time Dean's Scholar and recipient of the College of Engineering Scholarship and AAAE Academic Scholarship, Emma has consistently demonstrated academic excellence and leadership.

Emma has held multiple leadership roles in key aviation organizations, including Vice President and Historian of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) and Historian and Safety Officer for Alpha Eta Rho. She is also an active member of Women in Aviation. Through these roles, she has organized career panels, airport events, and community service initiatives, including volunteering at Girls in Aviation Day and supporting outreach efforts at regional airport events.

Her aviation experience includes three impactful internships: Tracy Municipal Airport, where she helped develop a custom internship program; San José Mineta International Airport, where she gained hands-on experience across multiple departments; and United Airlines at SFO, where she contributed to safety initiatives and operational planning. These experiences have shaped her goal of pursuing a career in airport operations, starting at SJC and eventually advancing into leadership roles.

Emma finances her education through personal loans and part-time work, and this scholarship will ease financial strain, allowing her to focus more fully on her professional development. With a strong work ethic, a passion for mentorship, and a drive to serve others, Emma is poised to make a lasting impact in the aviation industry and inspire the next generation of airport professionals.

Changing the World Scholarship

This scholarship was founded in 2010 through Women in Aviation International to honor SJSU Aviation Alumnus and past President of the Aero Club of Northern California, Sandra Clifford (1969-2024), who selflessly gave of herself to all that needed her. Sandra was a force of good, and all who knew her could see her drive to help. As a SJSU Student, she led student organization and was constant source of support to her fellow students. After school Sandra embarked on a varied aviation career where she held positions of flight instructor, profeesional pilot, airline spokesperson, flight school manager to flight attendant. This scholarship is given in her name and honors an individual who exhibit similar traites to Sandras in their efforts to mentor others, improved the aviation industry and make the world a better place.

Landon Abrar



Landon Abrar is a third-year Aviation Management student at San José State University with a lifelong passion for aviation and a career goal of becoming a Network Planner for a major airline. His academic excellence has earned him recognition as an SJSU President's Scholar and recipient of multiple scholarships, including the Dale and Sue Missimer SJSU Engineering Scholarship and the EAA Post-Secondary Scholarship.

Landon is deeply involved in the campus aviation community, holding leadership roles in Alpha Eta Rho, Women in Aviation, the American Association of Airport Executives, and the Precision Flight Team. He has organized educational events, managed social media, and mentored peers, while also representing SJSU at national conferences and competitions.

Professionally, Landon worked at Tradewinds Aviation as a Customer Service Representative and Reserve Fueler, gaining hands-on experience in general aviation operations and FAA regulations. He finances his education through scholarships and grants, taking 18–21 units per semester to graduate early while balancing leadership and service.

Landon's dedication, resilience, and drive to connect people through aviation make him a standout student and future industry leader. This scholarship will help him continue his leadership work and attend key industry events that support his career goals.



Gerald L. Shreve Scholarship

Gerald (Jerry) L. Shreve (1932–2020) was a dedicated educator, aviator, and mentor whose legacy continues to shape aviation education. Born in Monterey Park, California, Jerry served as a U.S. Air Force pilot from 1953 to 1957, later continuing in the USAF Reserve and California Air National Guard while earning his Aeronautics degree from San José State College in 1960 and an MBA from the University of Santa Clara in 1965.

Jerry began teaching at San José State University in 1960, rising to full professor by 1973 and retiring in 1995 after 35 years of service. His teaching and research focused on flight operations, aircraft maintenance, and aviation management. He also contributed to projects like the Mountain Lion Research Project as chief pilot and flight operations consultant. A passionate aviator, Jerry held a commercial pilot certificate with ratings for airplane single and multi-engine land and sea, helicopter, and instrument flight. He was also a certified flight instructor, ground instructor, and aircraft mechanic. He served as a lecturer for FAA Flight Instructor Refresher Courses and as an FAA accident prevention counselor.

Jerry mentored countless students through his roles as faculty advisor for the SJSU Flying Twenty club and head coach of the university's Precision Flight Team. He judged and coached at national and international flight competitions, including the World Precision Flying Championships in 1985.

His many honors include the William A. Wheatley Award, Paul Mantz Memorial Award, NIFA Outstanding Contribution Award, and induction into the International Forest of Friendship. In 2013, SJSU named its Flight Simulation Lab in his honor and recognized him as a Distinguished Alumnus. This scholarship celebrates Jerry's lifelong dedication to aviation education and his enduring impact on future generations of aviators.

Jerry's legacy is honored through numerous awards, including the William A. Wheatley Award, Paul Mantz Memorial Award, and NIFA Outstanding Contribution Award. In 2013, SJSU named its Flight Simulation Lab in his honor and recognized him as a Distinguished Alumnus. His enduring impact continues through this scholarship, supporting future aviators inspired by his lifelong dedication to flight, education, and service.

Russell Sunio

Russell Sunio is a dedicated Aviation (Professional Flight) student at San José State University whose passion for aviation was shaped by childhood flights to the Philippines to visit his father. These experiences inspired his dream of becoming an airline pilot and connecting families across the globe.

Russell began his college journey at San Joaquin Delta College, earning a 3.7 GPA before transferring to SJSU. He has received multiple scholarships, including the Charles W. Davidson College of Engineering Dean's Scholar, Joe Thomas Aviation Scholarship, and Gutierrez Foundation Aviation Scholarship.

He is an active member of the Precision Flight Team, competing in National Intercollegiate Flying Association events, and served as Alumni Affairs Chairman for Alpha Eta Rho. Russell earned his Private Pilot Certificate in 2021 and his Instrument Rating in 2025. With nearly 250 flight hours logged, he is currently working toward his Commercial Pilot Certificate and plans to become a Certified Flight Instructor.

Raised in a single-parent household, Russell has balanced academics, flight training, and caring for his family. His resilience and work ethic reflect a deep commitment to both personal growth and service.

This scholarship will help Russell complete his CFI training and begin instructing, allowing him to support his family and mentor future aviators. His long-term goal is to fly international routes for a major airline, creating meaningful connections for others—just as aviation once did for his own family.



Crystal Eagle Award Recipients

2025: Bonny Simi
2024: Joseph Edward Solbczak
2023: Col. Merryl Tengesdal
2022: Randy Howell
2021: no award (covid)
2020: no award (covid)
2019: Patty Wagstaff
2018: Barry Schiff
2017: John and Martha King
2016: Steve Hinton
2015: Alan Eustace
2014: Prof. Thomas Leonard
2013: Rod Machado
2012: Julie Clark
2011: Clarence E. "Bud" Anderson
2010: Brian Shul
2009: Mike Melvill
2008: Phil Boyer
2007: Steve Fossett
2006: Sean D. Tucker
2005: Eileen Marie Collins
2004: Elgen M. Long
2003: Clay Lacy
2002: A. Scott Crossfield
2001: Igor I. Sikorsky
2000: Wayne Handley
1999: Paul H. Poberezny
1998: Donald D. Engen
1997: Robert L. "Hoot" Gibson
1996: Darryl G. Greenamyer
1995: James S. Ricklefs
1994: Frank L. Christensen
1993: Robert T. Jones
1992: Jeana Yeager
1991: Allen E. Paulson
1990: George S. Cooper
1989: Elbert "Burt" L. Rutan
1988: Anthony W. "Tony" LeVier
1987: James M. "Jim" Nissen
1986: William "Bill" Lear, Sr.
1985: Stanley Hiller, Jr
1984: BG Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager
1983: Gen. James "Jimmy" Doolittle

The Aero Club of Northern California

Forty-First Annual Awards Banquet

Hiller Aviation Museum

November 15, 2025

Welcome and Introduction of Aero Club Board and Guests		Pamela Svrdlin
Aero Club Scholarship Awards Presentations		
James M. Nissen Sr. Scholarship	Ethan Tavares	Michelle Tripp
Robert L. Hamilton Scholarship	Anthony Duran	Edgar Mora
Thomas E. Leonard Scholarship	Emma Johnston	Wendy Mora
Changing the World	Landon Abrar	Gretchen Kelly
Gerald Shreve	Russell Sunio	Walt Gyger

DINNER

Aero Club - NAA Awards Gerry Fairbairn	Wendy Mora

Silent Auction Ends

Crystal Eagle Recipient Introduction	Gretchen Kelly
Guest Speaker	Bonny Simi
Crystal Eagle Award Presentation	Pamela Svrdlin

The Crystal Eagle Award

The Crystal Eagle:
A distinctive work of art

The Crystal Eagle Award is a unique work of art handcrafted in Italy of the finest crystal.

It is fitting that the eagle should be the symbol for the Aero Club's annual award. The North American eagle is recognized as a bird possessing great strength, natural grace, keenness of vision and power in flight. The eagle has historically been used by man to identify with flying.

The Crystal Eagle is mounted on a California redwood base, unique to Northern California. In its natural state, redwood has unusual durability, commensurate with the recipients of this coveted award.

The Crystal Eagle Award is presented annually by the Aero Club of Northern California to recognize an individual whose accomplishments have significantly contributed to the advancement of aviation



About Our Club

The Aero Club of Northern California was formed to promote activities which advance aviation and aerospace within Northern California.

We are a regional affiliate club of NAA, the National Aeronautic Association, which having been founded in 1905 as the Aero Club of America is the oldest independent, non-profit aviation organization in the United States, and the sole U.S.representative to the Federation Aeronautique International (FAI).

So central to aviation was the Aero Club that until 1926 it issued all pilot licenses in the United States.

The first five pilot licenses issued by the Aero Club were: 1) Glen H. Curtiss, 2) Lt. Frank P. Lahm, 3) Louis Paulham, 4) Orville Wright, and 5) Wilbur Wright. Until 1926, all other pilot licenses issued in the United States subsequent to these five were issued by the Aero Club of America.

We embrace the goals of our parent organization in our efforts to support a vigorous aviation and space program for sutdents at all levels of learning, and to recognize and honor those who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of aviation and space flight.

Donate

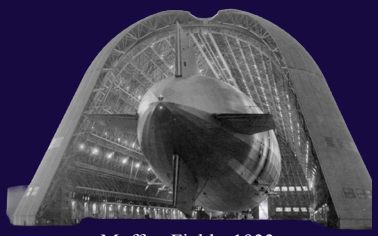
The secondary purpose of this event is to provide scholarships to aviation career minded college students. Please consider making a tax deductable donation to our scholarship program by pointing your cell phone camera at the QR code to the right and completing the donation form. The Aero Club and future aviators will be forever grateful.

About Our Logo

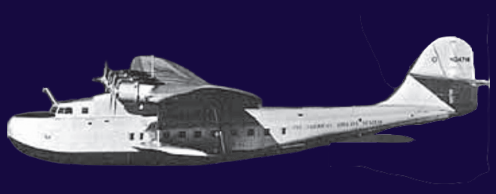
Incorporated in the logo of The Aero Club of Northern California are some of the most significant contributions the Northern California area has made to the art and science of flight.



Montgomery Fllight - 1904
Often referred to as “The Father of Basic Flying” Dr. John Montgomery was a true aviation pioneer. San Jose was the site of many of his historic achievements. Alexander Grahm Bell noted that, “All subsequent attempts in aviation must begin with the Montgomery Machine.”



Moffett Field - 1933
Dedicated April 12, 1933, Moffett Field was the United States guardian of the Pacific. It continues to be a major aviation facility supporting federal, military and private operations.



China Clipper - 1935
Lifting from San Francisco Bay waters on November 22, 1935, the Clipper became the first airplane to fly the Pacific non-stop. Cutting over 15 days off the best surface time from San Francisco to Manila, it led to the elimination of the barriers of space and time.



NASA Ames Reserach Ceneter - 1939
Northern California’s continued contributions to the quest for our ultimate destiny is assured by the ongoing advancements in aerospace science and technology at NASA’s Ames Research Center.