The Aileron

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# WAHID NAWABI

*47th Howard Hughes Memorial Award Winner*

There is a long way between Kabul and the executive suite of an American aerospace company. For Wahid Nawabi, that distance is measured not simply in miles, but in years, careers, and a series of unlikely turns that eventually led him to AeroVironment.

Today, Nawabi serves as Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer of AeroVironment, where he has been CEO since 2016. But his story begins much earlier, in Afghanistan, where he was born and where, at 14, he left the country with his three younger sisters. He has described the journey through Pakistan to India as lasting 48 days. Eventually, he came to the United States as a legal refugee.

The boy who made that journey would go on to study electrical engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park. It was a practical beginning for someone whose career would repeatedly revolve around technology, problem-solving, and building things that had to work in the real world.

Before aerospace, there was power management. Nawabi spent approximately 16 years at American Power Conversion, where he moved through increasingly senior roles and started and led the company's Enterprise/Data Center business. He later held executive positions at C&D Technologies and Altergy Systems. By the time he joined AeroVironment in 2011, he had already spent years learning how technology businesses are built, operated, and scaled.

At AeroVironment, the progression was relatively quick. Nawabi became Senior Vice President and General Manager of the company's Efficient Energy Systems business in 2011, then Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer in 2015. In January 2016, he became President and COO; four months later, President and CEO. He later became Chairman of the Board.

The company he inherited was already known for small unmanned aircraft. Under Nawabi, its portfolio has grown considerably broader. AeroVironment's familiar names include Raven, Puma, Wasp, and Switchblade, alongside work in autonomous systems, counter-UAS,

**NAWABI** *(from Front Cover)*



electronic warfare, cyber, space systems, and directed energy. The 2025 acquisition of BlueHalo expanded that reach further, bringing additional capabilities in areas including space, cyber, electronic warfare, and directed energy.

But Nawabi's professional story is not only about what happened inside the boardroom. Some of the most unusual chapters involve machines designed to operate where people cannot.

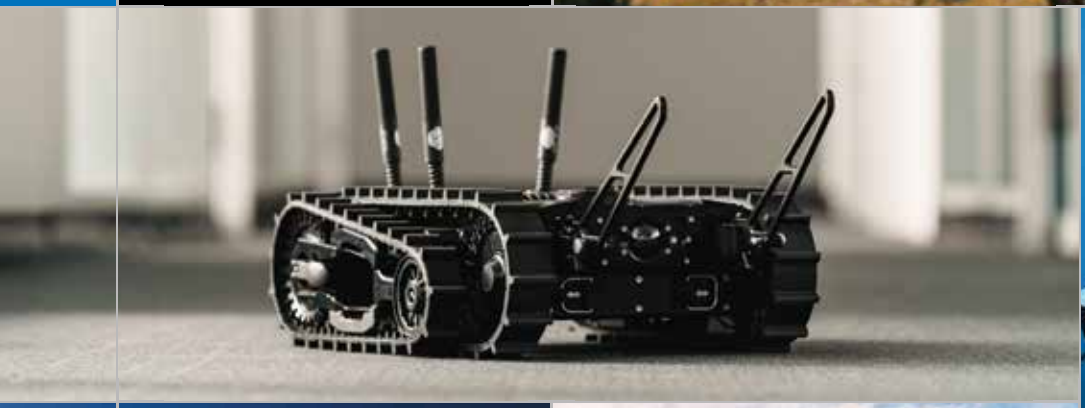
AeroVironment's work with NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) includes the high-altitude aircraft Pathfinder, Pathfinder Plus, and Helios. That experience eventually intersected with one of the company's notable engineering projects: NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter. AeroVironment built Ingenuity's rotor system, landing gear, and solar-panel substrate, while JPL oversaw the vehicle's overall system architecture, design, and development and integrated the full vehicle. In 2021, Ingenuity became the first aircraft to achieve powered, controlled flight on another planet.

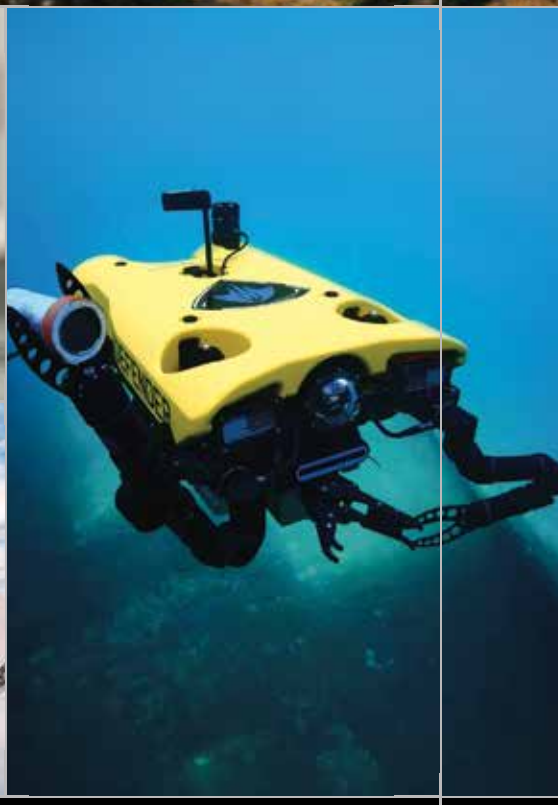
There is something fitting about that progression. A career that began with electrical engineering and power management ultimately led to technology operating in environments far beyond Earth. At AeroVironment, Nawabi's work has spanned not only unmanned aircraft, but also autonomous systems, space, and other technologies designed to extend what aerospace systems can do.

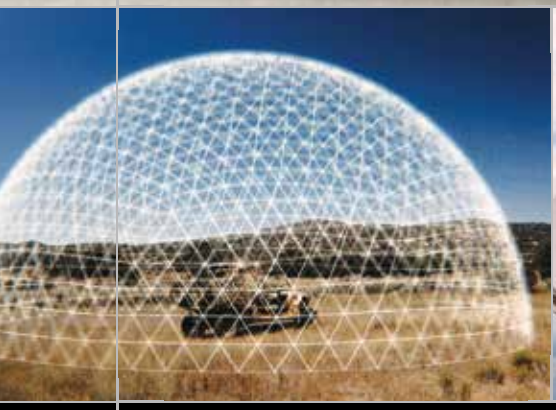
As the honoree of the 47th Howard Hughes Memorial Award, Nawabi is being recognized for a career that crosses those boundaries. From engineering and power-management technology to leading an increasingly diversified aerospace and defense company, his career reflects a sustained focus on developing and scaling technologies for increasingly demanding applications.













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# TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

**6 p.m.** Reception in main lounge
**7 p.m.** Adjourn to main dining room

### Welcome
***Carol Marinello***
Corporate Secretary

### Pledge of Allegiance
***Chris Pannacciulli***
Elected Executive

### Introduction
***Suzanne Fuentes***
President

### Dinner

### Young Professionals Group
***Julian Malevanets***
***Angelina Walsh***

### Aero Club History
***Jean-Christophe Dick***
***Mark Shoemaker***

### Scholarship Program
***Julie Sims***
Scholarship Director
***Jacob Wallis***
***Justin Tran***

### Howard Hughes Memorial Award Honoree Introduction
***Stephen Perry***
Vice President

### Award Presentation
***Suzanne Fuentes***
***Stephen Perry***

### Response
***Wahid Nawabi***

### Closing Remarks
***Carol Marinello***

### Thank You
***Mr. William Shaw, Our California Club Host,***
***Chevron El Segundo Refinery, El Segundo Chamber of Commerce,***
***Marsha Hansen, Ed Su, Studio Printing***



## Aero Club Leadership

**Suzanne Fuentes**
*President*

**Stephen Perry**
*Vice President*

**Arthur W. McAllister**
*Treasurer*

**Carol Marinello**
*Corporate Secretary*

**Chris Pannacciulli**
*Elected Executive*

**Julie Sims**
*Scholarships Director*

**Jean-Christophe Dick**
**Mark Shoemaker**
*Historian*

**Lily Craig**
*Assistant Treasurer*

**Amanda Meeks**
*Membership Chair*

**Zac Turke**
*ACSC General Counsel*

**Board Members**

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**J. Bruce Camino**
**Lily Craig**
**Amanda Meeks**
**Kevin Mickey**
**Rod Pierce**
**Jessi Snyder**
**Steve Wallis**

**Young Professionals Group**

**Julian Malevanets**
**Bruce Renner**
**Adam Sturdivant**
**Robert Suppelsa**
**Angelica Walsh**



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Since its founding in 1908, the Aero Club of Southern California - the oldest aero club west of the Mississippi - has stood as a steadfast champion of aerospace innovation. For more than a century, the Club has honored the giants who shaped our industry, invested in the rising generation that will carry it forward, and celebrated the unmatched aerospace heritage of Southern California.

That mission finds its fullest expression each year in three enduring commitments: bestowing the Howard Hughes Memorial Award upon industry titans whose careers have advanced aviation and space; awarding scholarships to passionate young people preparing for aerospace careers; and preserving the story of the region that helped give flight to the modern age.

Last year, we presented the 46th Howard Hughes Memorial Award to Neal Blue, Chairman and CEO of General Atomics. Under his leadership, General Atomics has become a global force in unmanned aerial systems, nuclear energy, and other frontier technologies - advancing aviation, strengthening defense, and expanding the promise of sustainable energy.

This year, we are proud to honor Wahid Nawabi, Chairman, President, and CEO of AeroVironment (AV). Nawabi leads AV with a singular purpose: to advance the technologies that protect the United States and its allies. In May 2025, he guided AV's $4.1 billion acquisition of BlueHalo, nearly doubling the company's scale and adding vital capabilities in space communications, counter-drone directed energy, RF jamming, and cyber. Under his stewardship, AV has grown nearly sevenfold, from roughly $300 million to $2 billion, while its market capitalization has expanded twentyfold, from about $500 million to $10 billion - an extraordinary chapter in contemporary aerospace leadership.

Our scholarship program reached new heights this year. Twenty-one scholars received a combined $175,000 in support. We extend our deepest thanks to our scholarship donors and corporate sponsors, whose generosity makes this investment in the next generation possible.

The Young Professionals Group continued to energize the Club with fresh ideas, engagement, and a spirit of service that strengthens our community and broadens our reach. We are grateful for their enthusiasm and for the vitality they bring to our work.

I am equally grateful for our all-volunteer Board of Directors and Committee Directors. Their dedication, judgment, and camaraderie are the quiet engine of our success. Serving alongside them is a true privilege.

The Club remains financially strong, allowing us not only to fund scholarships, young-professional programs, and meaningful events, but also to deepen relationships among our members and with the nonprofit partners who share our purpose.

If you are not already involved, I invite you to join us. Bring your friends and colleagues into the Club. Help us honor the past, support the future, and keep Southern California's aerospace tradition aloft for the generations still to come.

With gratitude,

Suzanne Fuentes

# Neal Blue Receives 46th Howard Hughes Memorial Award



Mr. Blue and Aero Club Scholars
Ved Chandra, Sean Kerry and Justin Tran.



Mr. Blue and ACSC Vice President Stephen Perry



Mr. Blue and Young Professionals Group
Committee Members Julian Malevanets,
Robert Suppelsa and Adam Sturdivant.

**Neal Blue, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of General Atomics, received the 46th Howard Hughes Memorial Award on October 28, 2025. The award celebrated Mr. Blue's nearly four decades of leadership in aerospace, defense, and advanced technology.**

**Aero Club President Suzanne Fuentes presented Mr. Blue with the silver Howard Hughes Memorial Award medallion. Mr. Blue expressed his gratitude to his family, friends, colleagues, and the next generation of aerospace and defense professionals.**

**Mr. Blue generously hosted and warmly engaged representatives from the Aero Club Scholars and Young Professional Group. The scholars and young professionals had a wonderful time connecting, exchanging ideas, and enjoying the occasion.**

**Distinguished industry leaders and close friends joined the Blue family at the sold-out gala held at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott, filling the evening with warmth, celebration, and shared pride in a memorable gathering.**

***Congratulations to Neal Blue on this well-deserved honor!***

# 2026 DONORS, SPONSORS, AND LIFETIME MEMBERS

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# Howard Hughes Memorial Award





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***The Howard Hughes Memorial Award,*** created in 1978, is presented annually by the Aero Club of Southern California to an aerospace leader whose career accomplishments over a long career have significantly contributed to the advancement of aviation or space technology.

The Award was created as a tribute to Hughes by his first cousin William R. Lummis, chairman and CEO of Summa Corporation.

The 46 recipients, pictured above, are a veritable "hall of fame" of the aerospace industry.

The permanent trophy, housed in the Flight Path Learning Center & Museum at LAX, is a globe and vehicle sculpture with the names of recipients engraved on its base.

A solid silver medallion, cast from silver from Hughes' Nevada mines, is presented to each Honoree. The award depicts Hughes from the era when he was designing and flying his famed Flying Boat, setting world records, dressed in his familiar brown fedora, open shirt and two-toned sports jacket. The reverse side signifies aspects of Hughes' varied life—the oil drilling bit, a reel of film, a landing falcon, the state of Nevada, the earth with a circle of stars symbolizing his round-the world record, the first communications satellite and the Flying Boat as it crested the waves of Long Beach Harbor.

# TWO STORIED TRADITIONS.
# ONE SHARED MISSION.



In 1938, the National Aeronautic Association presented Howard Hughes with the Robert J. Collier Trophy for his record-setting round-the-world flight.

His achievement embodied the spirit of daring, innovation, and precision, a standard of aviation excellence that continues to inspire us today.

LEGACY INSPIRES TOMORROW.

## HONORING A LEGACY OF AVIATION EXCELLENCE

The NAA proudly joins the Aero Club of Southern California in recognizing Wahid Nawabi with the 47th Howard Hughes Memorial Award.

Together, we celebrate the visionaries who push the boundaries of aerospace innovation, national security, and flight.

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Chris Reinecke
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Bruce Renner
ASSOCIATE

# Twenty-one Accomplished High School and College Students Awarded $175,000 in Aerospace Scholarships

The Scholarship Program Committee, led by Julie Sims, awarded $175,000 to twenty-one students selected for their passion and academic achievements in aerospace-related activities.

Da Vinci Schools in El Segundo hosted Aero Club's Annual Scholarship luau on June 26, 2026.

The evening celebrated the next generation of aerospace professionals while bringing together Aero Club members, scholarship recipients, their families, sponsors, and supporters.

Each student's accomplishments, educational goals and career aspirations were shared while receiving her/his scholarship. Our scholars' passion, talent, and dedication assures the future of our industry is in excellent hands.

Generous donations from Gary Burdorf of Helicopter Technology Company, Si Robin, Marsha Toy, General Atomics and HEICO made our record-breaking round of scholarships possible.

Thank you to our scholarship donors, members, volunteers, presenters, and everyone who contributed to this fun evening! Your generosity and commitment continue to create meaningful opportunities for students pursuing aerospace careers.



Scholarship Donor
Gary Burdorf



Scholarship Donor
Si Robin



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## Scholarship Recipients:

**Pranavi Chand**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Priyank Anilchandra Dhyani**
*Si Robin Scholarship*

**Riley Foard**
*Jack Real Scholarship*

**Leonardo Garcia**
*William Schoeneberger Scholarship*

**Kareem Gobran**
*Gary Burdorf of Helicopter Technologies Scholarship*

**Alejandro Gonzalez**
*Frank J. Palminteri of Helicopter Technologies Scholarship*

**Nathan Guerra**
*Jack Norris Scholarship*

**Holly Guerrero**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Dage Lee**
*John Durant Scholarship*

**Jaein Lee**
*General Atomics Scholarship*

**Sean Kerry**
*John Durant Scholarship*

**Henry Mallory**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Saahil Sinha**
*Nissen Davis Scholarship*

**Snow Tapper**
*HEICO Scholarship*

**Justin Tran**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Jazzie Trotter**
*Arthur McAllister Scholarship*

**Jacob Wallis**
*Colonel Robert C. Ettinger (USAF Ret) Scholarship*

**Angelina Walsh**
*HEICO Scholarship*

**Alexander Washburn**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Jacob Wier**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

**Natalie Wilson**
*Marsha Toy Scholarship*

# Congratulations HHMA Honoree
# WAHID NAWABI



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*Offer expires December 31, 2026*

# Young Professional Group

The Aero Club of Southern California's Young Professionals Group (YPG) is building momentum as a go-to network for emerging talent across aviation and aerospace.

YPG launched in May 2025 with a well-attended inaugural gathering in the South Bay. Young professionals and students from SpaceX, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon Technologies, UC Irvine, and other organizations met to exchange ideas, build connections, and explore opportunities across the industry.

The YPG Steering Committee—Julian Malevanets, Bruce Renner, Adam Sturdivant, Robert Suppelsa, and Angelina Marie Walsh—organized its first event and continues to guide the group's work.

In March, YPG and UCI aerospace students received a full day General Atomics facilities tour, hosted by General Atomics Director Bradley Garner and Program Manager Jarrett Smith. The Torrey Pines, Poway, and Rancho Bernado facilities offered a close look at the company's operations, manufacturing, and history, giving participants practical insight into one of the sector's leading organizations while expanding their professional networks.

YPG is planning a casual networking evening later this year as a low-pressure introduction to the Aero Club. Students and early-career professionals will have the chance to meet board members and industry colleagues in an informal setting. The program will feature a brief welcome and overview of the Aero Club, remarks from a board or committee representative, structured speed networking with conversation prompts, and open mingling. Light refreshments will be served, and aviation-themed favors are planned.

Longer-term priorities include regular communications, member spotlights, additional facility tours, and more social gatherings.

YPG welcomes college students and early-career professionals who want to grow within aviation and aerospace while supporting the Aero Club's mission of recognizing achievement and strengthening industry connections.

Annual YPG membership is $25 and includes access to networking events, professional development programs, and conversations with senior aerospace leaders. For additional information, visit aeroclubsocal.org/youngprofessionals or email YPG@aeroclubsocal.org.



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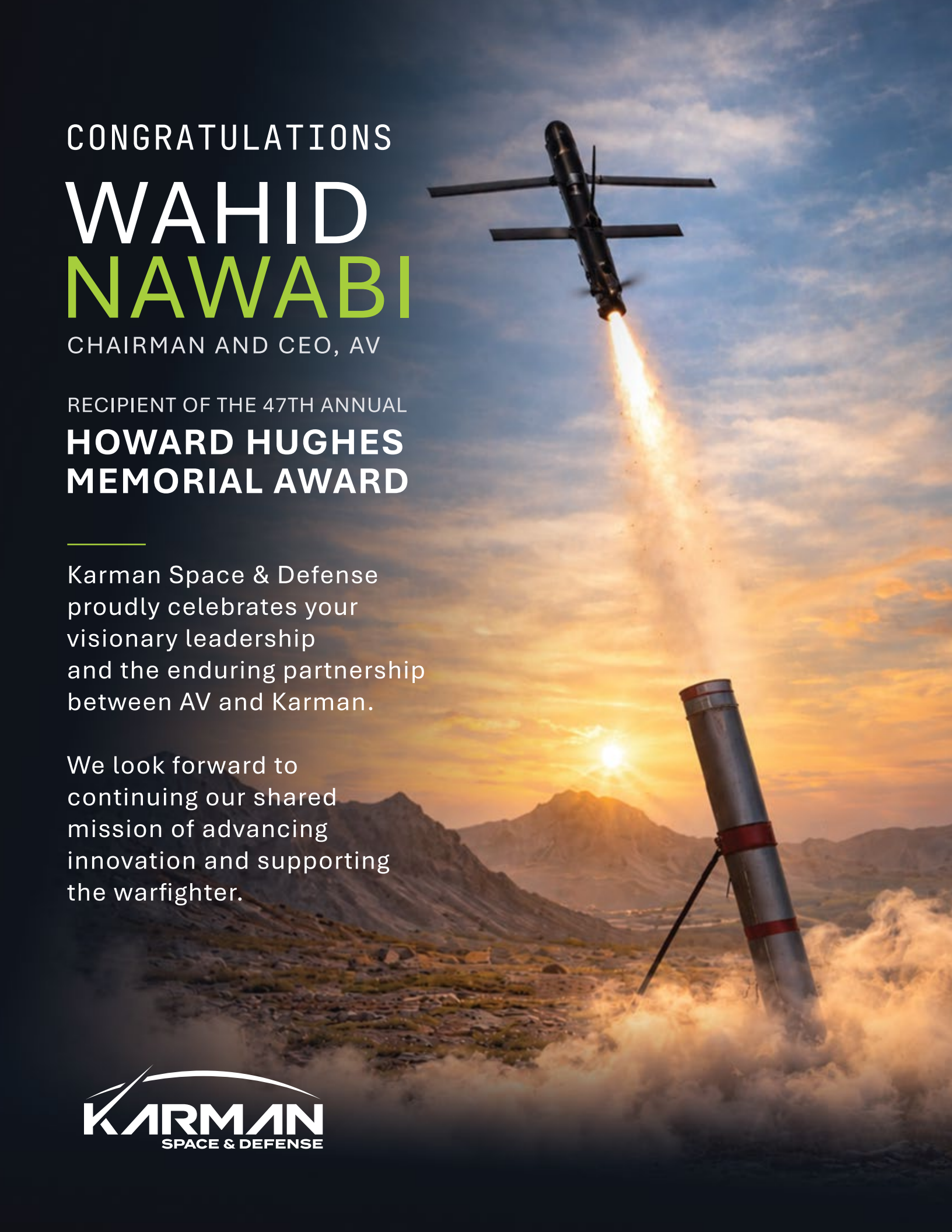






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# WAHID NAWABI

CHAIRMAN AND CEO, AV

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**About Helicopter Technology Company (HTC):** HTC designs and produces its own line of Helicopter Main and Tail Rotor Blades at its Facilities in Los Angeles, California. The company is an FAA Approved Production Approval Holder (PQ2115NM-D), FAA Part 145 Repair Station (HQPR671X), and EASA Approved Repair Station (EASA.145.6708) with ISO 9001:2015 + AS9100D and ISO 9001:2015 + AS9110C Certifications. Company Strengths include: Structural Design, Structural Testing, Non-Destructive Testing (NDT), Tool Design and Fabrication, Metal-to-Metal Bonding, Structural Assembly, and Flight Testing. HTC was formed in 1994 and has Rotor Blades in Service in more than 55 countries around the world.

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