



29th ANNUAL AMELIA EARHART FESTIVAL
July 17-18, 2026
Atchison, Kansas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**2026 Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award
will honor Duilia De Mello**

Extragalactic astrophysicist who discovered a Supernova

ATCHISON, Kan. (January 27, 2026) — The annual [Amelia Earhart Festival](#), set for July 17-18, is honored to announce **Duilia De Mello** has been named the Festival's **2026 Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award** recipient.

An extragalactic astrophysicist, her career is marked by pioneering contributions, including the discovery of Supernova 1997D, the identification of stellar nurseries outside galaxies and the characterization of the largest spiral galaxy identified to date.

Ms. De Mello was recently awarded the International Astronomical Union Women in aviation inaugural STEM Ambassador Recognition Award which recognizes leadership, advocacy of women in astronomy, mentoring and sustained efforts to promote equity, inclusive hiring and funding practices, and supportive academic environments.

Through extensive mentoring and outreach, she works to broaden access to science, particularly for girls in underserved communities.

“We are excited to welcome Duilia back to Atchison. She visited in August of 2017 to view the total solar eclipse. Duilia has accomplished amazing things in the astronomy world, and we’re excited to have her share her story both in the speaker’s symposium and as the featured speaker at the Pioneering Achievement Award Luncheon. Her devotion to STEM and her dedication to encouraging young girls to excel in science is vitally important in today’s world.” said Jacque Pregont, Amelia Earhart Festival coordinator.

On **Saturday, July 18**, Duilia will share her inspiring story.

- **10:30 a.m. CST** — Duilia will participate in the Speaker’s Symposium at **Benedictine College** in the O’Malley McAllister Auditorium, 1020 North 2nd St. in Atchison. The Speaker’s Symposium is free to the public.

- **Noon CST** — Duilia will be presented the Pioneering Achievement Award at the Amelia Earhart Festival luncheon in the Benedictine College Cafeteria. Tickets for the luncheon are \$30 and are available [online](#) or by calling 913-426-3911.

About the Pioneering Achievement Award

The annual [Amelia Earhart Festival](#) draws thousands of visitors to celebrate the trailblazing aviator in her Atchison, Kansas, hometown. As part of the celebration, the Festival honors a woman whose life and career exemplify triumph over adversity with the Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award.

Past recipients of the Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award include **Mae Jemison**, former NASA astronaut who became the first Black woman to travel in space; **Eileen Collins**, NASA's first female pilot and first female commander of a space shuttle; **Nancy Kassebaum Baker**, first woman to represent Kansas in the U.S. Senate; **Sophia Danenberg**, first Black American and first Black woman to climb to the summit of Mount Everest; **Tori Murden McClure**, first person to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean; **Major Nicole M. Malachowski**, first female pilot on any military flight demonstration as a member of the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds; **Amelia Rose Earhart**, the first pilot in command of a flight around the world in the Pilatus PC-12NG, **Mandy Horvath**, a bi-lateral amputee who climbed Pikes Peak and Mount Kilimanjaro; among other inspiring women, and **Tara Dower**, the record holder of the Fastest Known Time to complete the Appalachian Trail.

For more information about the Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award or the 2026 Amelia Earhart Festival, contact Jacque Pregont, Amelia Earhart Festival Coordinator, at aefestival@aaefm.org or Mary Jane Sowers mj@aaefm.org.

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