

# Best of the best

Photo courtesy of Michael A. Murphy, Spaatz Association



## *Civil Air Patrol cadets take center stage at Spaatz Association awards banquet*

*By Steve Cox*

On an evening commemorating the 45th anniversary of Civil Air Patrol's "modern" cadet program, it was only fitting that a lifelong friendship forged by two cadets served as an inspirational centerpiece for the Spaatz Association's 2009 Mid-Winter Dinner and Awards Event, a night of fellowship for recipients of CAP's highest cadet achievement, the Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award.

"Long-term friends are to be cherished," said U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Bobby J. Wilkes, one of the keynote speakers. "Listen to some comments from a friend of mine over 38 years ago."

Cadet Col. Natasha Cohen receives her Spaatz Association commemorative challenge coin from Brig. Gen. Richard Anderson, former CAP national commander and current president of the Spaatz Association. The presentation was made in front of a life-size photo of Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, who was represented at the dinner by several family members, including Spaatz family biographer Katharine Gresham.

Wilkes read a June 5, 1972, letter from the Spatz Association's national president emeritus, CAP Maj. Steve Austen, congratulating Wilkes on his appointment to the Air Force Academy Prep School. "I know you'll do us proud," wrote Austen, who first met Wilkes during a cadet summer encampment in Louisiana.

Enclosed with the letter was a small framed set of Air Force bars and cadet colonel diamonds. "Those diamonds and bars represented two major goals for me, the diamonds a CAP goal and the bars the biggest personal goal of my life," wrote Austen. "Later I found that, because of my eyes, I will never achieve my personal goal and will never wear those bars as an armed forces officer. It was then that I resolved to pass on my bars to a deserving person."

Those bars saw Wilkes through the Air Force Academy and on to a long military career. He retired as a major general and most recently served in the Pentagon as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Central Asia.

Wilkes encouraged the cadets in attendance to overcome the many uncertainties of today's world — like the



Photo by Steve Cox, CAP National Headquarters

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Bobby J. Wilkes is honored by CAP Brig. Gen. and Spatz Association President Richard Anderson. In his remarks, Wilkes challenged CAP cadets — many of them Spatz Award recipients — to always follow their dreams, despite the uncertainties of life around them.

wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the struggle to improve the global economy. "You can overcome the uncertainties," he said. "You can keep your dreams alive, just like Steve Austen, who nurtured a dream of mine through a selfless and kind act. You too can help someone achieve their dreams and achieve yours."

Among the nearly 200 people partici-

pating in the celebration, which benefited the Spatz Association's Aerospace Leadership Scholarship Fund, were Spatz's granddaughter and family biographer Katharine Gresham, first female Thunderbird pilot Air Force Maj. Nicole Malachowski and CAP National Commander Maj. Gen. Amy S. Courter.

## ALL ABOUT EXCELLENCE

CAP's first female commander and a leading proponent of Civil Air Patrol's cadet program, Courter called CAP cadets "the best of the best." As prime examples she cited Wilkes and Brig. Gen. Richard Anderson, Spatz cadet No. 193, who became CAP's national commander and is now Spatz Association president and a member of its Board of Governors.

"It's always been about excellence," said Courter, adding that CAP is "developing a pipeline" of high achievers. "Folks like Eric Boe (CAP's first astronaut) and Hila Levy (CAP's first Rhodes scholar) are finding ways to reach out," she said.

Courter was on hand for a spectacular November 2008 night launch of Space Shuttle Endeavour from Kennedy Space Center with Air Force Col. Boe,

Photo by Capt. Brenda Reed, Maryland Wing



Cadet Col. Wayne S. Mowery Jr. holds his Spatz award and listens as Brig. Gen. Richard Anderson talks about his many accomplishments. CAP National Commander Maj. Gen. Amy S. Courter presented Mowery with the award during the Spatz Association Mid-Winter Dinner and Awards Event, held in conjunction with CAP's Winter National Board meeting.

Spaatz award No. 648, at the controls. Boe was the orbiter's pilot and second in command for STS-126, which rendezvoused with the International Space Station during a 16-day flight. The first Spaatz award recipient to travel into space, Boe carried his Spaatz Association commemorative challenge coin into orbit. The coin will be permanently displayed at CAP National Headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.

Last May, Courter congratulated Air Force 2nd Lt. Levy, Spaatz award No. 1523, during graduation ceremonies at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Levy graduated first in order of merit in the academy's Class of 2008 and was selected for a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University, where she is studying global health science.

Courter noted the Spaatz award, with its promotion to the highest cadet rank of colonel, is the culmination of a CAP cadet's career and "the model for us." The award is presented to less than one-half of 1 percent of the nearly 22,000 CAP cadets nationwide. To earn it, cadets must complete all 16 prior achievements followed by a rigorous exam process, including a written aerospace exam, written leadership exam, physical fitness test and moral leadership essay.

## RECOGNIZING NOS. 1721 AND 1722

The event also included presentation of a Spaatz Association challenge coin to Cadet Cols. Wayne S. Mowery Jr. and Natasha Cohen, Nos. 1721 and 1722, respectively.

The moment was not lost on Mowery. "It was absolutely incredible! I felt honored to have the award presented amongst an audience that truly understood the significance of the achievement," he said.

Mowery, 20, joined Civil Air Patrol in 2004, and immediately set out in pursuit of CAP's highest cadet achievement. Being a Spaatz cadet means much more than being able to say "I completed the cadet program. It's a binding obligation that whatever I do in life I will do to the best of my ability, that I will set the example

for junior cadets and always lead by example," he said. "In my opinion, being a Spaatz cadet is where the true work really begins."



Civil Air Patrol Maj. Steve Austen earned Spaatz award No. 161 in 1971.

A freshman at the University of Maryland in College Park, Mowery plans to double-major in political science and Arabic studies and hopes to one day serve his country in the armed forces and on Capitol Hill.

Cohen passed the Spaatz exam on her first attempt. Like Mowery, Cohen, 20, was influenced by her squadron commander to work for the award. "I never planned to test beyond cadet major," said Cohen, a freshman at Boston University, where she is majoring in international relations with a minor in

Russian. "I did it because New York Wing hadn't had a Spaatz cadet since 2005; I also went for it to honor my squadron and Lt. Col. Johnnie Pantanelli, who joined CAP in December of 1944 and in all her years as squadron commander never had a cadet achieve the Spaatz award."

As she has during her nearly seven years as a cadet, Cohen plans to continue to nurture and mentor younger cadets and to help them achieve everything they can through the cadet program.

## AWARDING SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, the Spaatz Association gives out three \$2,500 Aerospace Leadership Scholarships that allow cadets to earn their private pilot's licenses at no cost. Over the years, these scholarships have totaled more than \$75,000.

The 2009 recipients recognized during the banquet were Cadet Lt. Col. Zachary King of the New Jersey Wing, Cadet Capt. Noah Bendele of the Pennsylvania Wing and Cadet Lt. Col. Jared Gragan of the West Virginia Wing. ▲

*Maryland Wing Public Affairs Officer Capt. Brenda Reed and Northeast Region Director of Public Affairs Capt. James A. Ridley contributed to this report.*