

# THE TALCOTT CONTINUUM

WHERE STEM EDUCATION, RESEARCH, & OUTREACH COME TOGETHER



## TALCOTT MOUNTAIN

SCIENCE CENTER • ACADEMY • RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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## The Mountain in Winter, The Mission in Motion



There is a unique stillness that has settled over our campus this winter. While the view from the top of Talcott Mountain is usually our hallmark, those of you local to our region know that the ridgeline is currently tucked away under a heavy blanket of snow, making it virtually impossible to take in the special view we know and love. Even as some of our favorite spots on campus take a winter nap, the energy inside our buildings is brighter than ever. This season of deep snow actually provides us a wonderful sense of focus, allowing us to lean into the vital work and vibrant discovery happening every day within our classrooms and laboratories.

This productive atmosphere is perfectly timed, as we have been working diligently to solidify the foundation for Talcott's next chapter. In our last newsletter, we shared our newly adopted mission statement, which grounds and guides all that we do: ***"We are a pioneering STEM institution where education, research, and outreach inspire and empower advanced and curious learners."*** Building on that foundation, I am proud to share that we have officially adopted a new vision statement that captures the heart of our mission:

***"To foster scientific curiosity, rigorous inquiry, and the imagination needed to build knowledge, solve problems, and steward future generations of STEM innovators."***

To me, this vision is a promise—a commitment to ensure that every student who summits this mountain (even via a plowed driveway!) leaves with the tools to change the world.

To guide us toward that vision, I am also proud to introduce a new set of core values that define the Talcott experience: **Explore, Inspire, and Innovate**. We are committed to igniting curiosity through immersive discovery, equipping curious minds with the confidence to contribute to society, and pushing the boundaries of STEM through collaborative problem-solving. These aren't just abstract concepts; they are the pillars upon which we are rebuilding and growing, ensuring that our small but mighty nonprofit remains a leader in specialized education.

Of course, a strong vision requires dedicated leadership. As many of you are aware, Dr. Kenneth Wright needed to depart Talcott Mountain Academy (TMA) mid-year due to unforeseen family circumstances that required his relocation. In the interim, I have stepped into the day-to-day life of the Academy as Interim Dean. Connecting with our students and faculty in this capacity has been a joy and a powerful reminder of why our work matters so much.



While I am enjoying my time in the hallways, the search for our next permanent Dean is moving forward. Our ad hoc search committee has been energized by the level of interest in the position; we received 40 applications from a diverse and highly qualified pool of educators and have since invited nine exceptional candidates for first-round interviews. The caliber of these individuals is a testament to Talcott's reputation, and we are on track to announce our new Dean in the spring, with an official start date in the summer of 2026.

As a community, we've weathered our share of change over the last few years, but the clarity of our new path makes me incredibly optimistic. The snow will eventually melt and the ridgeline will reopen, but the work we are doing right now—strengthening our values and securing our future leadership—is what will ensure we are ready to reach even higher when spring arrives. Thank you for being such a vital part of this journey with us.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Martin'.

Jeff Martin | Executive Director/Interim Dean, TMA



## Introducing New Members of the Talcott Team

Talcott Mountain Science Center, Academy, & Research Institute is excited to welcome three new members to our team this year. Each brings unique skills and experiences to support our students, families, and staff. Get to know Lia, Peyton, and Laura, who are already making a difference in their roles on the mountain.

We are thrilled to welcome Lia, Peyton, and Laura to the Talcott family and cannot wait for you to meet them!



**LIA ALOIA** | ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

I recently got married in October (Long Beach Island, NJ) and relocated to Connecticut. As a former classroom teacher, I knew I wanted to remain in education while transitioning into a role outside of the classroom. Talcott felt like a natural fit, allowing me to support students, families, and faculty while continuing to be part of a vibrant school community. I am looking forward to becoming an active part of the Talcott community by supporting daily operations, engaging in school events and programs, and getting to know the students, families, and staff.



**PEYTON EDWARDS** | MARKETING CONTENT CREATOR

As the Marketing Content Creator, I am here to capture the energy and joy of this wonderful school. I graduated with a degree in Media Studies and have been working for a local farm and vineyard managing their media ever since I graduated in 2023. I am passionate about photography and videography and how they can convey feeling and emotion through little moments. I am looking forward to being able to capture the exciting moments that happen here on the mountain and showcase our brilliant students and teachers!



**LAURA LAVORATA** | FRONT OFFICE COORDINATOR

I support daily operations and serve as a welcoming point of contact for students, families, and staff. Before joining Talcott, I spent several years as an Operations Supervisor for a Connecticut-based tavern, where I developed strong organizational, leadership, and problem-solving skills. I was drawn back to a school environment because it is something I have always enjoyed, and I originally began college with the goal of becoming a teacher before ultimately earning my degree in Human Resource Management. I am excited to bring my operational experience and people-focused background to Talcott and look forward to supporting the school community.

# Curiosity in Action: TMA Science Fair 2026

Talcott Mountain Academy (TMA) students brought energy and creativity to the annual Science Fair on Wednesday, February 4, 2026. Across every grade, they showcased careful observation, creative problem-solving, and hands-on experimentation.

Projects spanned chemistry, life science, earth science, social science, invention, and engineering. Students tested ice melt formulas, compared gummy bear osmosis, observed caterpillars changing color, and tackled inventive challenges such as earthquake-resistant LEGO structures, accessible pill dispensers, and cardboard planes designed for maximum lift.

Judges recognized the following top projects:

- **1st Place:** Raji Doshi (7th grade) — Carbon Dioxide Capture: Mitigate Ocean Acidification
- **2nd Place:** Konstantinos (Dean) Raptis (8th grade) — Cognitive Analysis of Social Media
- **3rd Place:** Brycen Raji (5th grade) — Bridge Battle
- **4th Place:** Lincoln Taylor (6th grade) — Seismic Home Design: Shake & Quake

Raji Doshi, Dean Raptis, Sheldon Hsiao, and Nikhil Krishnamurthy will represent TMA at the 2026 Connecticut Science & Engineering Fair in March.

More than a competition, the TMA Science Fair highlighted students' curiosity, skill, and dedication. It was a chance to experiment, explore, and show what they can achieve. Congratulations to all our students for their impressive projects and accomplishments!



STAY CURIOUS WITH US!

Visit [talcottscience.org/events](https://talcottscience.org/events) to learn more about upcoming Talcott Mountain Academy programs and events.

# Talcott Mountain Research Institute: Building What's Next

Last fall, we announced the launch of the Talcott Mountain Research Institute (TMRI). Today, we are pleased to share that the vision is already taking shape in meaningful and exciting ways.

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## TMRI 2026 Summer Program

Applications are now open for the TMRI 2026 Summer Program, a four-week, non-residential, immersive research experience designed for advanced high school students who are eager to engage with questions across the STEM disciplines. Structured as an authentic research apprenticeship, the program places students in small groups led by Faculty Research Mentors—scientists, mathematicians, and engineers who are actively engaged in research.

Throughout the program, students participate in sustained research, faculty-led discussions, field trips and community activities, and shared inquiry with peers who are similarly curious and motivated. Our goal is to invite students into the habits, uncertainty, creativity, and excitement of real research.

We seek students from high schools of all types who thrive on curiosity, challenge, and deep dives into STEM. If you know a student eager to pursue meaningful STEM exploration, we encourage you to share this opportunity.

Learn more and apply at [talcottmountainresearch.org](https://talcottmountainresearch.org).



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## TMRI 2026 Faculty Research Mentors

We are honored to welcome an extraordinary group of scholars who will guide students during the 2026 Summer Program:

- **Solaleh Miar, PhD** – Assistant Professor of Biomedical Engineering, University of Hartford
- **Xin Shen, PhD** – Assistant Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Hartford
- **Per Sebastian Skardal, PhD** – Marjorie V. and Robert W. Butcher Distinguished Professor of Applied Mathematics, Trinity College
- **Olivia Soliman, PhD** – Assistant Professor of Chemistry, University of Hartford
- **Michael West, PhD** – Astronomer, (formerly) Lowell Observatory
- **Jay White, PhD** – Director, Talcott Mountain Research Institute

Together, these mentors represent an intellectual breadth that reflects TMRI's interdisciplinary spirit and ambition.

### On the Shoulders of Giants Lecture Series

In addition to launching student research initiatives, TMRI is expanding its public engagement through the “On the Shoulders of Giants” (OSG) Lecture Series.

Hosted at the Talcott Mountain Science Planetarium, OSG invites leading STEM scholars and creative thinkers into conversation with the intellectually curious public. Each lecture offers insight not only into a field of discovery, but into the deeper human work of asking questions, testing ideas, and interrogating nature.

#### UPCOMING LECTURES



#### **Here’s Looking at You: The Invention Behind the Camera in Your Pocket**

Tuesday, May 12, 2026 | 6:30 PM

Talcott Mountain Science Planetarium

Reception to Follow

Featuring Dr. Eric R. Fossum

*John H. Krehbiel, Sr. Professor for Emerging Technologies*

*Thayer School of Engineering, Dartmouth College*

Tickets available February 2026.



#### **Wired for Wonder: Neurodiversity and the Future of Scientific Discovery**

Tuesday, October 6, 2026 | 6:30 PM

Talcott Mountain Science Planetarium

Reception to Follow

Featuring Dr. Keivan G. Stassun

*Stevenson Professor of Physics & Astronomy*

*Director, Vanderbilt Initiative in Data-intensive Astrophysics (VIDA)*

*Director, Frist Center for Autism & Innovation*

*Vanderbilt University*

Learn more about OSG Lectures at [talcottmountainresearch.org](https://talcottmountainresearch.org).

### Join Us in Building What Comes Next

TMRI is building something intentional and enduring: a place where students encounter authentic research, where distinguished scholars engage the public, and where curiosity is treated as a serious and transformative force.



We invite you to explore the growing work of the TMRI by visiting [talcottmountainresearch.org](https://talcottmountainresearch.org) or contacting Dr. Jay White at [jwhite@tmsc.org](mailto:jwhite@tmsc.org) if you have questions.

Your involvement matters. Whether you engage as a partner, advocate, mentor, or supporter, you help shape what TMRI will become. With your continued support, TMRI will extend Talcott Mountain’s longstanding commitment to empowering advanced and curious learners through STEM education, research, and outreach.

# Talcott Lightning: Relaunching a Robotics Legacy

Talcott Mountain Science Center's robotics team, Talcott Lightning, has a long history, with trophies dating back to the 1990s and early 2000s, but few in the years between. Over the past two years, led by Dhiren Dommeti, Computer Science and Technology Teacher and IT Specialist, the program has been relaunched through the First LEGO League (FLL), where students design, build, and program LEGO robots to solve complex challenges.

"As a first-time coach, I built the program to ensure students take ownership of their designs while receiving structured guidance in programming, and engineering strategy," Dhiren says. "My role is to mentor and challenge them to think critically, test ideas, and refine their solutions."

During the 2025 season, the team earned the Core Values Award at regional qualifiers and advanced to the state competition. In addition to competing with their robots, teams also complete research papers as part of the state competition requirements to showcase what they are learning in robotics. For the 2025 state competition, Talcott Lightning interviewed a Connecticut archaeologist as part of their research, which they presented to judges.

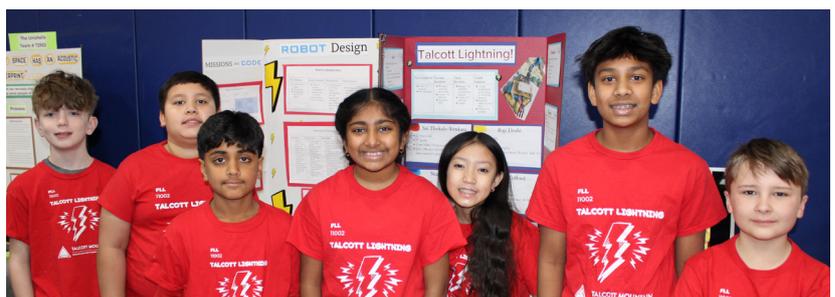
"Through structured coaching and intentional team development, students learned how to define roles, collaborate effectively, and approach complex problems with confidence," Dhiren shares. "Watching them grow into independent problem-

solvers has been one of the most meaningful outcomes of the program."

Talcott Lightning currently operates with two groups, a main competition team and a secondary team focused on skill-building and preparation for future seasons. The current team includes two Talcott Mountain Academy students, with others joining from surrounding schools. Dhiren is working to grow participation through outreach, sponsorships, and plans for a summer robotics program. Next year's FLL season will also incorporate computer science and artificial intelligence, expanding what students can explore.

"I would like to thank Jeff Martin and Dr. Kenneth Wright for their support throughout this robotics journey. Their encouragement and backing have been instrumental in relaunching and growing the program," Dhiren says. "I also want all the students to know that technology is not as hard as it seems. When they're interested in it, they can learn by exploring. Robotics is not just a hands-on learning experience, but an opportunity to hone the skills they are interested in and have fun along the way."

Talcott Lightning is shaping the next generation of innovators as the program continues to grow. Alumni and donors can spread the word, help recruit students, or explore sponsorship opportunities. To learn more or get involved, visit [talcottscience.org/science-center/robotics](https://talcottscience.org/science-center/robotics).





# Summer of STEM Adventures 2026

Summer on the mountaintop has always been a place of discovery, creativity, and curiosity. Summer of STEM Adventures 2026 is shaping up to be our most dynamic season yet. From June 22 to August 14, Talcott Mountain Science Center is offering seven weeks of exciting, hands-on, state-of-the art STEM programs for rising K-8 students.

## Why Summer of STEM Adventures Matters

Students engage in experiences that build confidence, strengthen problem-solving skills, and inspire a lasting love of learning. From building robots to dissecting specimens, exploring ecosystems, and experimenting with our lightning machine, every activity encourages curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

*“Amazing program. I have never been so impressed by the learning, skills, and maturity that my child gained during her weeks at Talcott. She’s never liked a camp before and she LOOOOOVED Talcott.”*  
– Summer Program Parent

## What’s New in 2026

This summer, we are introducing exciting new programs including App Design Lab, Eco Explorers, Electromagnetism, LEGO Engineering, Magic of STEM, Paleontology, and Science of Sports. Field trips are expanding as well, with a new Geocaching location, additional visits to Dinosaur State Park, and more adventures to bring science to life beyond the classroom.



### Register Today

Spots are filling quickly! Parents and guardians can secure their child’s place for Summer of STEM Adventures by visiting [talcottscience.org/summer](https://talcottscience.org/summer).



## JOIN THE SUMMER TEAM

We are looking for student volunteers and experienced instructors to help make this summer unforgettable.

With your support, Talcott’s Summer of STEM Adventures continues to be a place where curiosity thrives, friendships flourish, and young minds are inspired to reach higher.

Visit [talcottscience.org/get-involved/join-our-team](https://talcottscience.org/get-involved/join-our-team) to get involved.

## Meet Linda C. Ivany: Talcott Alumna and STEM Leader



Linda C. Ivany, PhD, Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in Earth and Environmental Sciences at Syracuse University, credits her early experiences at Talcott Mountain Science Center (TMSC) with shaping her career and her love of discovery.

Linda began attending TMSC in the mid-1970s as a fifth-grader in the Saturday program with Rob Amrein. From sixth grade through eighth grade, she joined small-group geology field trips across New York State. She even went on multi-week adventures to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, guided by Rob Amrein, John Pellino, Maggie Wilkinson, and other TMSC mentors.

“The field trips were incredibly formative,” she recalls. “They showed me such a diversity of geology, parts of the country I’d not seen before, and taught interpersonal skills that came from being with the same group 24 hours a day for a week or two, often in challenging conditions.”

Her connection to Talcott deepened in high school when she became a teaching assistant in the summer programs. There, she helped younger students explore geology, meteorology, astronomy, plant ecology, and pond ecology.

“Being a teaching assistant was a great way to build confidence, gain experience, and ‘practice’ for what I would ultimately end up doing as a professor,” she says. “It was really fun and inspiring to see kids get excited about things they’d never seen before.”

Today, Linda brings her passion for hands-on, discovery-based science to the Talcott Mountain Research Institute (TMRI) STEM Advisory Board. In this role, she helps guide TMRI’s initiatives and supports the advancement of STEM education.

“I’m a big fan of discovery-based science in the natural world,” she says. “Learning about some of the new initiatives brought me back around, and I’m looking forward to seeing how things develop [at TMRI].”

As a Syracuse University faculty member, Linda balances research, teaching, and service, reflecting the mix of curiosity, rigor, and mentorship she first experienced at Talcott decades ago. Her story is a testament to the lasting impact of early STEM experiences and the ways Talcott continues to inspire the next generation of scientists and educators.

## Talcott Alumni & Friends Gatherings

Alumni and friends of Talcott Mountain Science Center, Academy, & Research Institute gathered in Manhattan on Tuesday, February 3, 2026, for an evening of thoughtful conversation, reconnection, and reflection on time spent on the Mountain. Generously sponsored by Talcott Mountain Science Center alumnus Hamish Norton and Deirdre Norton at the Union League Club, and hosted by Jay White, PhD, Director of Talcott Mountain Research Institute, the gathering brought together longtime supporters and newer friends for shared stories, good food, and a look ahead, led by Dr. White, at the expanding work of Talcott Mountain Science Center, Academy, & Research Institute.

Alumni in other cities are warmly invited to look forward to similar gatherings near them—bringing the Talcott Mountain essence on the road. Those interested in sponsoring an event are encouraged to contact Dr. White at [jwhite@tmisc.org](mailto:jwhite@tmisc.org).



### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Talcott Mountain Academy Pi Day Giving Challenge – Saturday, March 14, 2026

On March 14, Talcott Mountain Academy will host the second annual Pi Day Giving Challenge! During the school day on March 13, students will compete to recite as many digits of Pi as possible while alumni, families, and supporters join the fun by pledging gifts in honor of Pi. A form will be shared for donors to submit their pledges, making this playful celebration of numbers and memory a meaningful way to support Talcott students and programs.

#### Talcott Together 2026 – Friday, May 29, 2026 | 5:30-9:30 pm

Talcott Together is Talcott Mountain Science Center, Academy, & Research Institute's signature reunion and fundraising event. Alumni, families, educators, and community partners all come together and support our mission to inspire and empower advanced and curious learners through education, research, and outreach. Registration will open in March.



### UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit [talcottscience.org/events](https://talcottscience.org/events) to learn more about upcoming events.





## SUPPORT TALCOTT MOUNTAIN SCIENCE CENTER, ACADEMY, & RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Your generosity helps Talcott continue to inspire learners of all ages. Gifts to the Science Center, Academy, & Research Institute support hands-on STEM programs, outdoor exploration, and innovative learning opportunities for students in grades K-12. Every contribution helps fuel curiosity, creativity, and discovery on the mountaintop.

*Make a gift today! Visit [talcottscience.org/donate](https://www.talcottscience.org/donate) or scan the QR code.*

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