

Chris Crumbly Elected AIAA Region II Director and Konrad Dannenberg Educator of the Year

By Joe Majdalani

The Greater Huntsville Section congratulates Chris M. Crumbly, one of its highly active professional members, on his election as the AIAA Region II Director, starting May 1, 2026. It also celebrates his selection as the Konrad Dannenberg Educator of the Year, a fitting recognition for a longtime NASA spaceflight leader, systems engineering educator, and tireless advocate for the future of the U.S. technical workforce.

Together, these dual recognitions celebrate not only what Crumbly has accomplished across a distinguished career in government, industry, academia, and nonprofit leadership, but also what he continues to build: new pathways for students and working professionals to enter and strengthen the digital engineering workforce.



Chris Crumbly receiving the Dannenberg Educator Award from Dr. Bob Tramel (GHS Section Chair) and Dr. Joe Majdalani (GHS Honors & Awards Director) at the 72nd Annual Awards Banquet, May 8, 2026, Botanical Garden, Huntsville, AL. As a NASA veteran who helped to advance human spaceflight, Crumbly is now helping to educate the workforce that will carry aerospace into the digital age; he also leads the Southeastern Region of AIAA during a critical period when aerospace education, workforce development, and digital engineering have never been more important.

The Konrad Dannenberg Educator of the Year Award recognized Crumbly *for increasing access to systems engineering education and promoting growth of a vital technical workforce sector by founding the Institute for Digital Enterprise Advancement*. The citation captures a defining feature of his present mission: bringing advanced systems engineering education, especially model-based systems engineering, to students and professionals who are preparing to serve in an increasingly digital engineering enterprise.

At Calhoun Community College in Huntsville, Alabama, Crumbly serves as a full-time instructor of Systems Engineering Technology. In that role, he is helping to prepare a new generation of systems engineering technicians and modelers, students whose work will support the increasingly complex needs of aerospace,

defense, manufacturing, and national security organizations. His teaching is not abstract or detached from practice. It is informed by decades of experience in human spaceflight, systems integration, program management, policy, and engineering leadership.

Concurrently, Crumbly serves as Board Chairperson for the Institute for Digital Enterprise Advancement, known as IDEA, and for DigitalWERX, IDEA's professional education entity. These nonprofit organizations were created, in part, to bring model-based systems engineering into community colleges and to accelerate digital engineering practices across the engineering community. Through the creation of the Systems Engineering Technology curriculum, IDEA has offered a practical, skills-based pathway for students who may not be enrolled in four-year universities but who can nevertheless enter high-wage, high-impact technical careers.

That mission is both timely and urgent. Modern aerospace and defense programs are becoming too complex, too interconnected, and too software-intensive to rely solely on traditional document-based engineering practices. Digital engineering and model-based systems engineering offer the promise of stronger traceability, improved collaboration, better configuration control, and more efficient communication across disciplines. By helping move these practices into the community-college environment, Crumbly and his colleagues are not merely teaching a new toolset. They are facilitating access to a critical technical language of the future.

The scale of that work is already impressive. Crumbly has trained more than 500 professional engineers, instructed more than 75 Systems Engineering Technology students in MBSE techniques and methods, and taught systems engineering at the graduate level. His classroom, therefore, extends far beyond a single campus. It reaches working engineers, adult learners, early-career students, industry partners, and organizations seeking to modernize how they conceive, design, verify, and manage complex systems.

This educational leadership is not an unexpected turn in Crumbly's career. Rather, it is a continuation of a lifelong pattern of taking complex systems, whether institutional, technical, educational, or organizational, and helping them become more palpable, capable, coherent, and effective.

Before joining Calhoun, Crumbly served as a principal research engineer at Auburn University after having served as Vice President for Digital Enterprise at Victory Solutions. Both organizations were partners in the creation of the Systems Engineering Technology program, a collaboration that helped bring together academic vision, nonprofit leadership, industry relevance, and workforce need. He also served as Senior Director for Space and Defense Programs at the University of Tennessee Space Institute, where he was under contract to National Aerospace Solutions as Technical Director at the Air Force Arnold Engineering Development Complex. Prior to that, he served as Executive Director of the Von Braun Center for Science and Innovation, a technical nonprofit devoted to advancing scientific and technological collaboration.

Crumbly's industry experience also includes service as Vice President for Business Development, Civil and Commercial Space, at Teledyne Brown Engineering. In these roles, he carried forward the same blend of technical insight, management experience, and strategic perspective that had defined his earlier NASA career.

That NASA career lasted 27 years and placed Crumbly at the center of some of the most impactful human spaceflight efforts of his generation. At NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, he managed the Space Launch System Program's Spacecraft/Payload Integration and Evolution Office. In that role, he was responsible for the development of spacecraft and payload interfaces for SLS and for technical innovations intended to increase the

performance and reduce the cost of America's next-generation heavy-lift rocket for human and scientific exploration beyond Earth orbit.

His responsibilities included interface hardware, payload integration, spacecraft accommodation, and advanced technologies associated with the evolving SLS architecture. These were not peripheral tasks. They stood at the confluence of mission ambition, vehicle capability, systems engineering discipline, affordability, safety, and national exploration policy.

Crumbly's earlier NASA assignments reveal the same pattern of trusted leadership. He served in management positions at Marshall, as Special Assistant to NASA's Deputy Administrator, and as Senior Space Policy Analyst at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. He contributed to the International Space Station era, the Space Launch Initiative, the Orbital Space Plane, Constellation, Shuttle propulsion systems engineering and integration, the Michoud Assembly Facility, and the early shaping of the Space Launch System itself.

His prior nominations for AIAA recognitions have emphasized this breadth repeatedly. In 2017, he became Associate Fellow and received the Holger Toftoy Award *for his superb technical management of the highly complex and deeply intertwined technological challenges and advanced concepts affecting NASA's ambitious Space Exploration Programs*. In 2019, he was named the Earl Pearce Professional of the Year, *for his extraordinary leadership, professionalism and development of technical exchange and incubator programs that promote the engineering workforce*. At the national stage, he was also recognized with the [Von Braun Award for Excellence in Space Program Management](#) *for his superb record of sustained excellence in furthering human spaceflight through strategic planning, transforming the Michoud Assembly Facility, and leading key elements of the Space Launch System*.

Those earlier recognitions are important because they highlight the trajectory that led to the 2026 Dannenberg Award. Crumbly's educational impact did not stem from theory alone. It grew from decades of practice in the real world of space systems, where failure is not an academic inconvenience, complexity cannot be ignored, and integration is the difference between wishful thinking and smooth operation.

At NASA, Crumbly helped to manage the systems and institutions that enable spaceflight. At Calhoun, IDEA, and DigitalWERX, he now helps to prepare the people who will manage the next generation of complex systems. This continuity gives his work special force. When Crumbly teaches model-based systems engineering, he is not simply explaining diagrams, models, requirements, or interfaces. He is transmitting the habits of thought that sustain large technical programs: disciplined abstraction, clear communication, stakeholder awareness, configuration control, verification logic, and the capacity to see both the whole system and the smallest interface that can make or break it.

His election as AIAA Region II Director adds another dimension to his activities. AIAA Region II, which represents the southeastern aerospace community, includes sections and student branches that connect professionals, educators, researchers, students, and industry leaders across a region with deep aerospace roots. In taking on this role, Crumbly will help to coordinate and strengthen the activities of local sections, student branches, and countless members while serving as a liaison between regional members and the Institute's broader leadership.

It is difficult to imagine a more fitting leader for such a role. Crumbly's career spans NASA, industry, academia, community college education, nonprofit service, public policy, technical management, and professional society engagement. He understands the needs of students because he teaches them. He understands the needs of professionals because he has trained them. He understands the needs of institutions because he has led them. He understands the needs of the aerospace enterprise because he has spent a career helping it evolve.

A native of Rome, Georgia, Crumbly holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in aerospace engineering from Auburn University and is a graduate of the Program for Management Development at Harvard Business School. His Auburn roots remain central to his professional identity. Like so many Auburn aerospace alumni who have gone on to shape the Huntsville and national aerospace communities, Crumbly has carried forward a practical, service-minded, technically-grounded approach to leadership. His professional society service is equally distinguished. He is an Associate Fellow of AIAA and a Fellow of the American Astronautical Society. He serves on several professional and civic boards, including the National Space Club–Huntsville, the Tennessee Valley Corridor, and AIAA. For example, he has served on the AIAA Public Policy Committee beginning in 2019 and as chair since 2022.

The Konrad Dannenberg Educator of the Year Award is especially fitting because Dannenberg's legacy was never limited to engineering achievement alone. It was also a legacy of inspiration, teaching, and the conviction that technical progress depends on cultivating people. Crumbly's work stands in that tradition. Through IDEA, DigitalWERX, Calhoun Community College, Auburn partnerships, professional training, and AIAA leadership, he has made education not an afterthought to engineering, but one of its central themes.

For the Greater Huntsville Section, Crumbly's dual recognition is a source of pride. For Auburn University's Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, it is another reminder of the far-reaching impact of its alumni. For Calhoun Community College, IDEA, and DigitalWERX, it affirms the importance of a bold educational experiment whose effects are already being felt across the engineering community. For AIAA Region II, it marks the arrival of a director whose career embodies the very breadth of the Institute's mission: shaping the future of aerospace.

Throughout his NASA career, Chris Crumbly has helped to advance America's path beyond Earth orbit. Through his work in systems engineering education, he is helping to prepare the people who will build, model, integrate, and manage the next generation of complex systems. Through his election as AIAA Region II Director, he now extends that spirit of service across a broader professional community.

In aerospace engineering, lasting impact is rarely measured by a single program, position, or award. It is measured by the systems one strengthens, the institutions one serves, the students one teaches, the professionals one equips, and the communities one inspires. By that measure, Chris Crumbly's dual recognition in 2026 is not merely well deserved. It is profoundly appropriate.