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AFTAC Airmen honored with Larson Awards

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Three members of the Air Force Technical Applications Center here are Larson Award medalists for 2016.

Maj. Gen. Bradford J. “BJ” Shwedo, commander of 25th Air Force, recognized Staff Sergeant David Pettinelli, Tech. Sgt. Ryan McLain and Tech. Sgt. Dustin Hoffman as the best scientific applications specialists in the Numbered Air Force.

The Larson Award is named after Maj. Gen. Doyle E. Larson, the first commander of Electronic Security Command, a predecessor organization of the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Agency (now 25th AF). The award recognizes the best enlisted technicians in the NAF whose accomplishments in 20 different career fields are vital to the ISR mission.



More than 19,000 ISR Airmen in the grades of E-1 through E-6 were eligible to compete for this year’s recognition, and each applicant was required to take a knowledge- and experience-based exam as part of the competition. Winners are awarded gold, silver and bronze medals for their achievements.

There were 36 exceptional Airmen recognized for 2016.

“Eighty percent of our NAF is enlisted,” said Shwedo, “and the winners of this award are the best and brightest of those Airmen.”

The AFTAC technicians traveled to San Antonio with AFTAC Commander Col. Steven M. Gorski and Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Joseph to receive their awards at a 25th AF-hosted ceremony Nov. 2, 2016.

Pettinelli, AFTAC’s noncommissioned officer-in-charge of alpha-beta measurements in the center’s Ciambone Radiochemistry Lab, was surprised at his selection.

“I am very honored to be named one of the winners for 2016,” said Pettinelli. “Our career field is highly competitive in entry requirements, and diverse working knowledge is essential to the many realms in which we function.”

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He continued, “I want to thank the leadership at 25th Air Force and especially their command chief, Chief Master Sgt. Roger Towberman, for pushing to make this awards program even more respected. The many bright and motivated leaders and co-workers I’ve had over the past five-plus years at AFTAC, including my supervisors, superintendents, branch chiefs and commanders, all played a huge role in guiding me to learn as much as possible about our mission and skills required to perform to the best of my ability.”



Pettinelli is a repeat Larson award competitor and winner; in 2013 and 2014 he competed but didn’t advance past the second round of testing. Last year, he was a silver medalist. This year, he collared the gold.

“Occasionally, repeat winners have a chance to ‘three-peat,’ which automatically retires them from further competition. My goal is to have several ‘Larson Award retirees’ here at AFTAC in the future.” said Joseph.

Hoffman, a laboratory measurements flight chief and 2016 bronze medalist for AFTAC, humorously pondered about how he was selected as a Larson Award winner.

“Earning this award matters to me for one of two reasons: either it shows me that my technical growth over my career has proven to be one of the best in our career field; or that I’m an exceptional guesser on tests. I can take pride in either truth! All kidding aside, it feels good. The best part was the time we spent at Lackland AFB. As part of the experience, Maj. Gen. Shwedo tasked us with a problem-solving mission, and when we presented our solution, it was an honor to truly be heard by him and his wing commanders.”

Hoffman added, “To my fellow 9S100s, make sure you test next year; don’t let me win two years in a row!”

Gorski had nothing but praise for his AFTAC winners.

“As a commander, nothing makes me more proud than to see our Airmen recognized for their incredible hard work and dedication to the mission,” said Gorski. “Prestigious programs like the Larson Award give us the opportunity to reemphasize the importance of what our Airmen do and reaffirms our commitment to them. There are a little more than 300 9S100s throughout the Air Force, and three of the best are right here at AFTAC. They should be enormously proud of their accomplishments.”