

# Battelle Provides \$40,000 Funding for Boys and Girls Club of AC Drone Program

*The Atlantic County Economic Alliance connects the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City with Battelle, which provided funding for an aviation/drone program.*

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES, July 24, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The

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*ACEA President Lauren H. Moore, Jr.*

hopes and dreams of teens in Atlantic City are taking flight thanks to a \$40,000 Battelle grant that the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City (BGCAC) has used to create an aviation and drone program. The multi-faceted aviation program began in fall 2022, when promising STEM high-school students got to take an introductory aviation course offered through Atlantic Cape Community College. Those students then worked with BGCAC staffers to mentor 160 inner-city youths during the second half of the school year, exposing even more Atlantic City children and teens to the use of drones and opportunities presented by the aviation industry.

Representatives of both the BGCAC and Battelle credit the Atlantic County Economic Alliance (ACEA) with getting the program off the ground.

Don LaMonaca, Director of Battelle’s Critical Infrastructure Business Line, says that a conversation with ACEA president Lauren Moore, Jr. led Battelle to the BGCAC. As a contractor at the William J. Hughes FAA Technical Center, LaMonaca says he became interested in the Aviation Innovation Hub and the National Aerospace Research & Technology Park (NARTP), as a potential site location for Battelle’s southern New Jersey operation. Once LaMonaca learned that the ACEA is part of the NARTP development team and a leader in the Aviation Innovation Hub, he reached out to Moore for information.

“Don described Battelle’s mission around STEM education to me and my team and we told him about the ACEA’s efforts to advance aviation education programs for Atlantic County youth,” said Moore. “While the ACEA’s activities often focus on business attraction and the diversification of our regional economy, we recognize the need for Atlantic County’s youth to be key players in developing the business trends of tomorrow. Thanks to Battelle, these students are getting

invaluable exposure to the aviation industry, drone piloting, and to the many career opportunities this field presents for them, hopefully right here in Atlantic County."

"Battelle directly invests in the expansion of high-quality STEM education programs, like the one that is thriving at the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City," said LaMonaca. "Our targeted philanthropy bridges the gap between STEM learning and underserved and traditionally overlooked student populations. Our annual grant awards are helping reach talented young students in Atlantic City, who may have not otherwise had access to STEM programs that support their interest."

The BGCAC has used the Battelle grant to cover staffing costs, enrollment in the ACCC aviation course (tuition, fees, books, and supplies), and purchase of equipment, including drones. Seven high school students successfully passed the aviation class and earned college credits. The program is designed to have those teen students work with BGCAC staff facilitators to visit Atlantic City elementary and middle schools to present demonstrations and fun activities that include drones. In addition to the demonstrations, every week from January through May there was a Drone Day at the BGCAC, where kids signed up for after-school activities with drones.

"Battelle and ACEA, through their resources in the field of aviation, have provided our youth at Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City the opportunity to not only learn more about a field very unfamiliar to them, but they have had the opportunity to educate their peers during the process," said Dr. Aigner Holmes, COO of the BGCAC. "Our youth are informed daily that there is no limit to their success; opportunities such as this allow for them to be creative, to think big, and surpass their own imaginations."

Battelle is an independent not-for-profit organization that advances science and technology to have the greatest impact on our society. Battelle provides comprehensive scientific solutions to companies and government agencies across multiple markets, including health, national security, infrastructure, and environment. Battelle's team based in Egg Harbor Township works with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to develop aviation safety and security technologies to safeguard airports across the country. As



Students who recently participated in the Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City's Drone Program pose with Pat Gentile of the ACEA (far left) and Don LaMonaca (far right), of Battelle. A drone can be seen hovering high above the group at the BGCAC's facility.

part of its mission to do the “greatest good for humanity,” Battelle is steadfast in its commitment to make science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education accessible to as many students as possible.

“Since that initial interaction with Lauren and his team, the ACEA has provided insights and access to educational initiatives in Atlantic County that align with Battelle’s philanthropic objectives,” said LaMonaca. “They have served as my primary interface for developing and administering associated grant applications and funding. Their involvement has been invaluable in helping to maximize the impact of Battelle’s support to STEM education programs for youth in our local community.”

While Holmes says the BGCAC intends to continue the program in the next school year, this year’s drone program concluded with a unique final project: The students collaborated on a documentary featuring video of Atlantic City’s 48 blocks captured by drones. Holmes is quick to point out that the song presented in the video was also written and produced by the club’s kids. The video is proof that the Battelle grant is helping Atlantic City youth reach new heights.

For more information about the ACEA, visit [aceanj.com](https://aceanj.com) or contact the ACEA’s Lauren Moore, Jr. at (609) 245-0019 or [lmoore@aceanj.com](mailto:lmoore@aceanj.com).

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