

KATHRYN McWILLIAMS (1972-2025)



Kathryn McWilliams (PhD, PEng, FRAS), Professor of Space Physics at the University of Saskatchewan and Director of the Super Dual Auroral Radar Network (SuperDARN) Canada National Research Facility, passed away at her home in Saskatoon on January 3, 2025, after a short illness.

After Kathryn finished her Master's at the University of Saskatchewan, she went on to complete a PhD at the University of Leicester in the UK on a prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship. She then came back to USask as a postdoc in 2002, before quickly becoming a professor in 2004. At USask, Kathryn became the first ever female tenured faculty member in Physics. In 2022, she became the first Canadian ever to be recognised as a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society of the United Kingdom.

Kathryn McWilliams was SuperDARN, and SuperDARN was her. She was there from the very beginning – building the Saskatoon antenna array in 1993 when she was a summer student and leaving her handprint in one of the cement bases. Her memory will echo there, and at her four other radars, for years to come.

Her enthusiasm for this field, her radars, her colleagues, her students, her engineers, was boundless and inspirational. The way she spoke with those not in our field was passionate and loving. And to those in our field, she would lift high above herself. There are many examples, but one shining achievement is the CaNoRock Canada-Norway rocket launch program, which she led, and resulted in the funding of over 250 Canadian students in graduate programmes.

Kathryn was a true leader and an incredible human being. Many of us will remember her for the sincere generosity she gave in every aspect of her life. We should all strive to be more like her. She built countless people up to love her field, and her absence now at the University of Saskatchewan, within the international SuperDARN community, CAP/DASP, CEDAR, GEM, and MIST communities, has been, and will continue to be, extremely painful for all of us. The world has lost an astounding scientist and person, and the international space science community mourns this loss together with Kathryn's family.

Rest in peace, Kathryn.

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