PRESS KIT

Tanaka Chonyera

Mechanical & Aerospace Engineer · Project Manager, Capital Projects, Eli Lilly and Company · Founder, High-Power Rocket Bootcamp

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Facts as of November 1, 2026

MEDIA CONTACT

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The latest version of this press kit is at tanakachonyera.com/press-kit. Upcoming build and launch dates are at tanakachonyera.com/join.

FAST FACTS

Program	High-Power Rocket Bootcamp (Dreamernaut Rocket Bootcamp), a free program in which students build, paint and launch their own high-power rockets
Founder and lead instructor	Tanaka Chonyera, mechanical and aerospace engineer; Project Manager, Capital Projects at Eli Lilly and Company
Started	August 2025, with the first launch on August 24, 2025, at the Rocketeers of Central Indiana field in Muncie
Cohorts	10, from August 2025 to September 2026 (listed below)
Participants trained	390+
Rockets built / launched	336 built; 170+ launched
Maximum altitude	5,000 feet
Adult volunteers	174+
Student contact hours	2,800+
Cost to families	$0. The only charge is a $25 retention fee, refunded when the student attends every session. The program covers $325+ of value per student.
Ages	8 and up. Ages 6 and 7 can take part with a parent at the table for the build.
Format	One to three build days, then a launch day at an approved launch site. Some partner events are a single build day.
Where	Builds in Indianapolis, Fishers and Lebanon; launches at club fields in Muncie and Pence and at Sheridan Airport
Funding raised	$155K+: $80K through MEPI (the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis), including a $40K Cummins grant, and $75K from Lilly Social Impact for the 2026 Global Day of Service. Purdue University separately funded the Indiana Black Expo Youth Leadership Summit cohort.
Funding partners	MEPI, Cummins, Eli Lilly and Company, Purdue University
Program partners	Indiana State Museum, Indiana Black Expo, City of Fishers, Enlace Academy, Hattie B. Stokes Elementary, Girl Scouts of Central Indiana, Indiana Rocketry, Rocketeers of Central Indiana; in-kind supporter System Three Resins. Program spending has gone to 23 U.S. small businesses. Details
Safety	Students build the airframes; the motors are commercially manufactured and certified. Launches follow the NAR or Tripoli safety code of the host club, with FAA airspace coordination, at club launch fields and at Sheridan Airport. Tanaka is the Flyer of Record and inspects every student rocket before launch.
Public goal	1,000 student rockets, and the most rockets per capita in the world for Indiana

Figures as of November 1, 2026, from program attendance records and funding agreements. Documents behind each claim: tanakachonyera.com/recognition#claims.

ABOUT THE BOOTCAMP

The High-Power Rocket Bootcamp is a free program in Indiana where students build, paint and launch their own high-power rockets, flying as high as 5,000 feet. Engineer Tanaka Chonyera founded it in August 2025. It has trained 390+ participants across ten cohorts, with 336 rockets built and $155K+ raised through MEPI, including a Cummins grant, and from Lilly Social Impact. Purdue University separately funded one cohort. Tanaka runs the bootcamp with MEPI, the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis. It is separate from his job at Eli Lilly; Lilly Social Impact funded the 2026 Global Day of Service cohort.

STORY ANGLES

- A capital project manager at Eli Lilly runs a free high-power rocketry program for Indiana students.
- Students build and launch their own rockets to as high as 5,000 feet at no cost to their families.
- He started a rocket club at his high school in Botswana and won a continental essay prize, and he now teaches rocketry in Indiana.
- For Lilly's 2026 Global Day of Service, 124 volunteers helped students at Hattie B. Stokes Elementary in Lebanon build 145 rockets for a launch at Sheridan Airport the next day.
- The goal is 1,000 student rockets and the most rockets per capita in the world for Indiana.
- Launch days are visual: rockets leaving the pad, parachute recoveries and students retrieving their own rockets.

Upcoming build and launch dates are posted at tanakachonyera.com/join. Reporters are welcome to ask about attending a build day or launch day.

QUOTES

- "I know what rocketry has done for me in my life, and I think it's something that is super inspirational to pursue." Tanaka Chonyera, as quoted in the Indianapolis Star, October 29, 2026
- "My goal is to make Indiana have the most rockets per capita in the world." Tanaka Chonyera, tanakachonyera.com/projects
- "Supporting, educating, and inspiring the next generation of Hoosier STEM graduates." Letter of Recognition from Indiana Governor Mike Braun, September 25, 2026
- "Your commitment does not go unnoticed." Eric Dozier, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Eli Lilly and Company, Rise Recognition certificate, October 14, 2026
- "We were not quite sure if he's crazy or the next Nobel Prize winner or something like that. And we actually put our money on the second one." ESA astronaut Paolo Nespoli, chair of the DStv Eutelsat Star Awards jury, at the February 13, 2019 announcement, video at 1:15

More from parents, teachers, engineers and Franklin College students: tanakachonyera.com/testimonials.

PHOTOS AND VIDEO

- Photos: tanakachonyera.com/gallery, including the 2026 Global Day of Service and the January 2020 launch trip.
- Video: tanakachonyera.com/press#watch, including the WTHR, Fox59 and Indianapolis Star segments.
- High-resolution photos with captions and credits are available on request from tanaka@dreamernaut.com.

BIOS

Short (about 50 words)

Tanaka Chonyera is a mechanical and aerospace engineer and a capital project manager at Eli Lilly and Company in Indianapolis. In August 2025 he founded the High-Power Rocket Bootcamp, a free program where students build and launch their own high-power rockets. It has trained 390+ participants across ten cohorts.

Medium (about 125 words)

Tanaka Chonyera is a mechanical and aerospace engineer who leads a $150M+ capital capacity expansion at Eli Lilly and Company in Indianapolis. Born in Zimbabwe and raised in Botswana, he founded his high school's first student-led rocketry program in 2018 and won 1st place in Africa in the essay category of the 2018 DStv Eutelsat Star Awards. He earned a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering with an Aerospace Concentration from Michigan State University in 2024. In August 2025 he founded the High-Power Rocket Bootcamp, which has trained 390+ participants, built 336 rockets and raised $155K+. In 2026 he received a Letter of Recognition from Indiana Governor Mike Braun and was named an NSBE 25 Under 25 honoree.

Long

Tanaka Chonyera is a mechanical and aerospace engineer and a Project Manager, Capital Projects at Eli Lilly and Company, where he leads a $150M+ capital capacity expansion of warehouse and logistics infrastructure from design through construction, commissioning and qualification. He joined Lilly in June 2024.

He was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Botswana. At Maru-a-Pula School in Gaborone he founded the school's first student-led rocketry program, the Maru-a-Pula Rocketry and STEM Club, in February 2018 and built solid-propellant rockets from scratch. His rocket won the gold medal at the 2018 Lebone STEM Derby in South Africa, where the school placed first overall. On February 13, 2019, he was announced as the 1st place essay winner in Africa at the 2018 DStv Eutelsat Star Awards, Botswana's first win in that category, and in January 2020 the prize took him to Kourou, French Guiana, to watch an Ariane 5 launch.

At Michigan State University he earned a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering with an Aerospace Concentration in 2024 on $140,000 in merit-based scholarships. He built a high voltage divider for laser spectroscopy at the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, developed a faster diamond electrode fabrication method at Fraunhofer USA, interned at First Solar and led his senior capstone team's aerodynamic design for MSU Solar Racing.

In August 2025 he founded the High-Power Rocket Bootcamp, a free program where students build, paint and launch their own high-power rockets. As of November 1, 2026, it has run ten cohorts, trained 390+ participants, built 336 rockets and raised $155K+. At LDRS 44, the Tripoli Rocketry Association's annual national launch in April 2026, he made 34 flights, the most of any flyer. He received a Letter of Recognition from Indiana Governor Mike Braun in September 2026, was named an NSBE 25 Under 25 honoree in 2026 and received an Eli Lilly Rise Recognition in October 2026. His work has been covered by the Indianapolis Star, WTHR, Fox59 and The Week Junior.

NAMES AND SPELLINGS

- **Tanaka Chonyera**: engineer and founder of the bootcamp.
- **High-Power Rocket Bootcamp**, also called the **Dreamernaut Rocket Bootcamp**.
- **MEPI**: the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis.
- **ROCI**: Rocketeers of Central Indiana, whose launch field is in Muncie.
- **Indiana Rocketry**: the club whose field in Pence hosted LDRS 44, the Tripoli Rocketry Association's annual national launch.
- **NAR**: the National Association of Rocketry.
- **High-power rocketry**: rockets that use motors above G class (more than 160 newton-seconds of total impulse) or weigh more than 1,500 grams. Flying them requires a certified flyer.
- **Maru-a-Pula School**: his high school in Gaborone, Botswana.
- **DStv Eutelsat Star Awards**: the pan-African science essay and poster competition where he placed 1st in Africa in the essay category in the 2018 edition.

COHORTS

#	COHORT	BUILD	LAUNCH
1	**Summer 2025** Camp Dellwood, Girl Scouts of Central Indiana · Indianapolis	Aug 2, 9 and 16, 2025	Aug 24, 2025 ROCI field, Muncie

2	**Fall 2025** Park · Indianapolis	Nov 1 and 8, 2025	Feb 8, 2026 Indiana Rocketry field, Pence (November launches scrubbed for wind)
3	**Winter 2026, first group** Camp Dellwood · Indianapolis	Jan 25, 2026	Feb 8, 2026 Indiana Rocketry field, Pence
4	**Winter 2026, second group** Camp Dellwood · Indianapolis	Feb 1, 2026	Feb 8, 2026 Indiana Rocketry field, Pence
5	**Spring 2026** Camp Dellwood · Indianapolis	Apr 4 and 18, 2026	Apr 19, 2026 Indiana Rocketry field, Pence, during LDRS 44
6	**Enlace Academy** Indianapolis · 75 students	May 7, 2026	One-day build
7	**Indiana Black Expo Youth Leadership Summit** With Purdue University · Indianapolis	Jul 17, 2026	No launch (one-day build)
8	**Indiana State Museum, Space Day** Indianapolis	Jul 18, 2026	One-day build
9	**City of Fishers** Fishers Maker Playground · Fishers	Aug 2, 2026	Aug 9, 2026 ROCI field, Muncie
10	**Lilly Global Day of Service** Hattie B. Stokes Elementary · Lebanon	Sep 24, 2026	Sep 25, 2026 Sheridan Airport

RECOGNITION

- **Letter of Recognition from Indiana Governor Mike Braun**, presented September 25, 2026, at the Sheridan Airport launch. Letter
- **Eli Lilly Rise Recognition, "Deliver,"** October 14, 2026, nominated by Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer Eric Dozier. Certificate
- **NSBE 25 Under 25, Class of 2026**, National Society of Black Engineers; selected February 16, 2026. Honoree letter
- **LDRS 44**, April 16 to 19, 2026, Pence, Indiana: #1 flyer by flight count with 34 flights, more than double second place, out of 852 flights from 576 registered flyers. Official flight report
- **1st Place in Africa, 2018 DStv Eutelsat Star Awards**, essay category, announced February 13, 2019; judged by a panel chaired by ESA astronaut Paolo Nespoli. Award record
- **Lebone STEM Derby, South Africa, 2018:** gold medal for his rocket; Maru-a-Pula placed first overall. Video
- **African Leadership Academy STEM Derby, 2019:** Maru-a-Pula placed runner-up with his parabolic solar concentrator.
- **Boeing Scholarship**, Michigan State University College of Engineering, 2024. Certificate

PREVIOUS COVERAGE

DATE	OUTLET	STORY
October 29, 2026	Indianapolis Star	"Meet Tanaka Chonyera, the man aiming to inspire next generation of rocket scientists," by Christine Tannous, with a 20-photo gallery and video; syndicated by Yahoo and MSN indystar.com
September 25, 2026	Eli Lilly and Company social media (Instagram, LinkedIn)	Global Day of Service project card for the Indiana rocket build, one of 210 Global Day of Service projects worldwide linkedin.com
June 15, 2026	Fox59 Indy Now, also aired on CBS4	"MEPI High-Power Rocket Bootcamp with Fishers Maker Playground" fox59.com

April 3, 2026	The Week Junior (national weekly)	Profile in the People section tanakachonyera.com
March 3, 2026	97.5 WCOS (iHeartRadio) Morning Rush	“Rocket Scientist Launches Rocket Camp For Kids” 975wcos.iheart.com
February 26, 2026	WTHR 13News (NBC Indianapolis)	“Indianapolis engineer launches free rocket boot camp for kids,” by Alex Almanza, broadcast and online; syndicated by Yahoo wthr.com
2025 to 2026	Reddit (r/space, r/pics, r/rocketry and others)	Posts about the bootcamp, nine above 100,000 views and three above 380,000. View counts: tanakachonyera.com/recognition#metrics reddit.com
March 25, 2022	The Greensheet, Facility for Rare Isotope Beams	Feature on his high voltage divider for laser spectroscopy tanakachonyera.com
February 21, 2020	Botswana Guardian	“DStv Eutelsat Award’s Botswana winner sets Africa’s sights on space,” the same headline as the MultiChoice Botswana release of February 19 tanakachonyera.com
February 19, 2020	MultiChoice Botswana	Press release on the prize trip to Paris and French Guiana tanakachonyera.com
January 22, 2020	Eutelsat Communications (Flickr)	Photo and video of Tanaka at the Ariane 5 launch, Guiana Space Center flickr.com
March 31, 2019	Space in Africa	“18-year-old Tanaka Chonyera wants to lead Zimbabwe to space” spaceinafrica.com
March 6, 2019	Mwananchi (Tanzania)	“Tanzania yang’ara DStv Eutelsat Star Awards” mwananchi.co.tz
February 26, 2019	The Patriot on Sunday	Interview with MultiChoice Botswana’s managing director naming him the continental winner tanakachonyera.com
February 22, 2019	Botswana Guardian	“Botswana’s Future Astronaut is Born” tanakachonyera.com
February 18, 2019	Mmegi	“Motswana Wins At DStv Eutelsat Star Awards,” by Mompati Tlhankane tanakachonyera.com
February 15, 2019	Space in Africa	“Botswana and Tanzania students win DStv Eutelsat Star Award” spaceinafrica.com
February 14, 2019	MultiChoice Group, News Ghana, Botswana Unplugged	Winners announcements and coverage multichoice.com
February 13, 2019	Eutelsat (English and French releases)	Winners of the 8th DStv Eutelsat Star Awards mynewsdesk.com
February 2019	Maru-a-Pula School	“MaP’s Tanaka Chonyera Wins ‘Star Award,’” plus the school newsletter and the principal’s LinkedIn article (February 25, 2019) maruapula.org
2019	BTV, DStv and Yarona FM	Botswana national television, DStv and radio interviews

Captures, scans and transcripts of every item: tanakachonyera.com/press.

TIMELINE

Written by Tanaka in the first person. The same timeline is at tanakachonyera.com/timeline.

Until 2017

Until 2005	I went to Whitestone School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.
2005 to 2012	In Botswana I went to Busy Bees, then Broadhurst Primary School in Gaborone, where I graduated in 2012.
2013	I spent the year at Legae Academy.

2014	I started at Maru-a-Pula School in Gaborone, where I studied until 2020.
May 2017	I wrote ALACOM, a messaging app built as a console program in Visual Basic .NET, and kept improving it in numbered releases. Source
November 2017	I earned 5 A* and 4 A grades in my Cambridge IGCSE exams. Source
2018	
January 28, 2018	The Sunday Standard featured me among Maru-a-Pula's top IGCSE students. Source
February 2018	I founded the Maru-a-Pula Rocketry and STEM Club, the school's first student-led rocketry program, and started building solid-propellant rockets from scratch. Source
April 2018	I received a Science Olympiad (Informatics) Certificate of Achievement from the Botswana Science Association, as part of the International Junior Science Olympiad selection. Source
2018	At the Lebone STEM Derby in South Africa, Maru-a-Pula placed first overall and my rocket won the gold medal. Source
October 2018	I wrote my essay for the DStv Eutelsat Star Awards, on better uses of satellites. Source
2019	
January 25, 2019	Mmegi printed Maru-a-Pula's results page with my AS-Level results. Source
February 13, 2019	The 2018 DStv Eutelsat Star Awards winners were announced in Accra, Ghana. I won 1st place in Africa in the essay category, the first Botswana win in that category. Source
February 14 to 18, 2019	The win was covered by the MultiChoice Group newsroom, News Ghana, Botswana Unplugged and Mmegi. Source
February 22, 2019	The Botswana Guardian ran "Botswana's Future Astronaut is Born". Source
February 26, 2019	The Patriot on Sunday interviewed MultiChoice Botswana's managing director, who described me as the continental winner. Source
March 2019	At the African Leadership Academy STEM Derby, I entered a parabolic solar concentrator, and Maru-a-Pula was runner-up.
March 2019	Mwananchi in Tanzania covered the win, and I was interviewed on Yarona FM. Source
March 31, 2019	Space in Africa published "18-year-old Tanaka Chonyera wants to lead Zimbabwe to space." Source
May 24, 2019	I gave an assembly talk to students and parents at Broadhurst Primary School, the primary school I attended. Source
July 1, 2019	I received a certificate of appreciation from the Maru-a-Pula Naalano Leadership Conference. Source
August 9, 2019	I received the BSPCA Service Award through Maru-a-Pula School Service. Source
2020	
January 13 to 20, 2020	The Star Awards prize trip took me to Paris and then to Kourou, French Guiana. Source
January 16, 2020	I watched Ariane 5 flight VA251 lift off from the Guiana Space Center. Source
February 19, 2020	MultiChoice Botswana released "DStv Eutelsat Award's Botswana winner sets Africa's sights on space". Source
February 21, 2020	The Botswana Guardian covered the trip under the same headline. Source
September 2020	I started a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering with an Aerospace Concentration at Michigan State University on $140,000 in merit-based scholarships.

2021 and 2022

September 2021 to April 2022	I worked as a Mechanical Design & Nuclear Physics Research Intern at the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, designing and building a high voltage divider for laser spectroscopy as a Wielenga Research Scholar. Source
September 2021 to April 2022	I was on the aerodynamics and powertrain team of MSU Formula Racing. Source
March 25, 2022	FRIB's Greensheet featured the high voltage divider. Source
April 2022	I presented my poster, "Accurate High Voltage Measurement for Laser Spectroscopy," at MSU's undergraduate research forum as first author. Source
April 13, 2022	The MSU College of Engineering wrote me a letter of recommendation. Source
May 2022 to May 2023	I worked as an Applied Research & Additive Manufacturing Intern at Fraunhofer USA, where my boron-doped diamond electrode method cut production time by 40%. Source
September 2022 to May 2024	I served as Secretary and Communications Chair of the MSU chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers.

2023 and 2024

May 2023	A paper in Biosensors acknowledged me for experimental help with the Fraunhofer electrode work. Source
May 22 to August 18, 2023	I worked as a Development & Process Engineering Intern at First Solar in Perrysburg, Ohio. Source
January to April 2024	I led the aerodynamic body design team for MSU Solar Racing as my senior capstone. The cockpit design cut drag coefficient by 50%. Source
February 21, 2024	The MSU College of Engineering named me a 2024 Boeing Scholarship recipient. Source
May 2024	I graduated from Michigan State University's Honors College with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering. Source
June 3, 2024	I started at Eli Lilly and Company as a Project Manager, Capital Projects.
November 16, 2024	I organized a rocket field trip to the Indiana Rocketry launch at Pence.

2025

March 2025	I drafted the plan for a free High-Power Rocket Bootcamp with MEPI, the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis.
August 2 to 24, 2025	The first cohort built rockets at Camp Dellwood on August 2, 9 and 16 and launched on August 24 at the ROCI field in Muncie. Source
November 1 and 8, 2025	The Fall 2025 cohort built its rockets. Wind scrubbed both November launch days, and the cohort flew on February 8, 2026. Source

2026

January 25 and February 1, 2026	Two Winter 2026 cohorts built rockets at Camp Dellwood. Source
February 8, 2026	The Winter 2026 and Fall 2025 cohorts launched at the Indiana Rocketry field in Pence. Source
February 16, 2026	NSBE selected me for its 25 Under 25 Class of 2026. Source
February 26, 2026	WTHR ran "Indianapolis engineer launches free rocket boot camp for kids". Source
March 3, 2026	97.5 WCOS (iHeart) Morning Rush picked up the WTHR story. Source
March 18 to 22, 2026	I was recognized at the NSBE Annual Convention in Baltimore. Source
April 2026	The Week Junior profiled me in its People section, and Lilly featured my STEM mentorship during National Volunteer Week. Source

April 16 to 19, 2026	At LDRS 44 in Pence, the Tripoli Rocketry Association's annual national launch (852 flights from 576 registered flyers), I made 34 flights, the most of any flyer. Source
April 19, 2026	The Spring 2026 cohort launched 39 rockets at LDRS 44. Source
May 7, 2026	I ran a one-day build for 75 students at Enlace Academy, the first replication of the bootcamp at another institution. Source
June 15, 2026	Fox59 Indy Now ran a segment on the bootcamp with the City of Fishers, also aired on CBS4. Source
July 17, 2026	I ran a one-day build at the Indiana Black Expo Youth Leadership Summit with Purdue University. Source
July 18, 2026	I ran a one-day build at the Indiana State Museum's Space Day. Source
August 2 and 9, 2026	The City of Fishers cohort built at the Fishers Maker Playground and launched in Muncie. Source
August 17, 2026	System Three Resins became an in-kind supporter.
September 24 and 25, 2026	For Lilly's Global Day of Service, students built rockets at Hattie B. Stokes Elementary in Lebanon with 124 volunteers and launched at Sheridan Airport. Source
September 25, 2026	Governor Mike Braun's Letter of Recognition was presented at the Sheridan Airport launch. Source
October 8, 2026	I spoke to Professor Miranda Carter's public relations class at Franklin College. Source
October 14, 2026	I received an Eli Lilly Rise Recognition, nominated by Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer Eric Dozier. Source
October 29, 2026	The Indianapolis Star published "Meet Tanaka Chonyera, the man aiming to inspire next generation of rocket scientists," syndicated by Yahoo and MSN. Source

CONTACT

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