

USU Students Unveil Engineering Honor Society Statue Dedicated to Astronaut Alumna

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Utah State University alumna Mary L. Cleave made history as the 10th woman to fly in space. What fewer people know is that she was a member of Tau Beta Pi, the oldest engineering honor society in the U.S. In recognition of Cleave's contributions to USU engineering, two former chapter presidents unearthed a Tau Beta Pi statue and dedicated it in her honor.



The Bent statue, a symbol of the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society, was unveiled on Sept. 21, 2026, after a two-year effort by Utah State University engineering students Tyler Black and Jackson Mandry.

On the last day of summer at USU's Logan campus, the Bent Statue was unveiled after a two-year effort by Tyler Black and Jackson Mandry, 2026 graduates from the department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

The project began when Black realized this statue would be a great physical representation on campus of the society's commitment to character and excellence in engineering. However, it wouldn't be easy.

"The biggest challenge overall was just getting the project rolling because no one knew what Tau Beta Pi was," said Mandry, the 2025-26 chapter president and Bent restoration officer.

To begin the process, Mandry coalesced a group including John Chase and Ben Berrett of Facilities, Director Katie Lee-Koven of the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art and the USU Public Art Committee. After getting the go ahead on the project, they were met with their next challenge: Funding.

Learning that Cleave was a Tau Beta Pi member, Mandry and Black spoke at a 2025 event dedicated to her, highlighting the connection between the astronaut and the honor society. The project gained traction with support from David Jones, dean of the College of Engineering, and was funded by Autoliv, Rocky Mountain Power and dario wightman.

After pulling the statue from its solitude in the basement of an engineering building, the next challenge was removing it from its old base. It took Mandry several weeks to figure out how to cut through a steel pipe that locked it into concrete.

After freeing the statue, members of the society gathered for an inaugural polishing of the Bent, a tradition for most Tau Beta Pi chapters.

With the old base disposed of and the Bent polished, Mandry and Black used 3D software to design a new support structure for the statue. After years of preparation, the new concrete base was poured in November 2025, with the plaque completed in early 2026.

"It wasn't an easy project, but it was a worthwhile one," said Mandry at the unveiling ceremony.

Stationed outside the Richard and Moonyeen Anderson Engineering Building, the statue's dedication reads, "Engineer – Astronaut – Educator," honoring Cleave's achievements in space and the impact she's had on generations of USU engineers.

"The goal is to inspire engineers that, like Cleave, want to go and impact the world positively," said Black. "I think it's going to remind students that after all of the homework and all of the lectures, they're going to be engineers and that means they can make an impact on the world."

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