



HORIZON COMMONS

David E. Thomas, President



David E. Thomas is an executive, science diplomat, and research scientist whose thirty-year career spans academia, government, the defense sector, and commerce. Across every setting, one thread has held constant: a conviction that people everywhere carry the desire to discover their purpose and make a difference, and that the right opportunities and communities can unlock it. That conviction has matured into the mission that guides his work today — creating communities of innovators around the world, empowering local leaders to build sustainable opportunity that advances regional prosperity, resilience, and human flourishing.

For the past several years David has applied that mission to one of the most demanding frontiers of all: Space. As founding Executive Director of the Milo Space Science Institute at Arizona State University, the world's first university-led space agency, he built a new model for how nations and institutions take part in space. The Milo model pools collaborative funding, plays a coordinating role with industry partners, and invests in capacity building, so that countries with mature spaceflight heritage and those with young, growing ecosystems alike can join compelling missions. Under his leadership the Institute has engaged more than 150 organizations across 40 countries and established the legal and policy frameworks that make sustained international collaboration possible.

A Professor of Practice in ASU's School of Earth and Space Exploration and a 2025 Outstanding Faculty Award recipient, David is also the architect of the pedagogy behind this work: Mission-Based Learning and Frontier Entrepreneurship. His approach sets aside the lecture hall in favor of real missions; teams solving authentic, high-stakes challenges together, integrating technical proficiency with the durable, human skills that is require in teams. He designed and teaches graduate curricula in global space entrepreneurship, space diplomacy, professional leadership, and Space in the age of AI, and has led executive programs and innovation challenges from D.C. to Ecuador and the UAE, preparing principled leaders for the global economy.

David's fluency in both science and diplomacy is unusual. He pairs broad technical command with cultural awareness and a diplomatic manner that opens doors at senior levels of government, and he builds relationships on trust and principled frameworks rather than transactions. He established a dedicated Space Diplomacy practice aligned with the U.S. State Department's Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy, signed a NASA Space Act Agreement on behalf of ASU to prepare students worldwide for lunar-focused careers, and founded the Milo Ambassador Corps, a network of professionals across Africa, the Indo-Pacific, Latin

America, MENA, North America, and Europe. His work has cultivated trusted relationships across the Americas, the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the UK, the Middle East, and Africa, including active partnerships with the UAE Space Agency, MBRSC, and Emirati universities.

That diplomatic and educational leadership rests on a deep foundation as a scientist and executive. Before ASU, David served as CEO of ASU Research Enterprise, as a director at CFD Research Corporation where he increased annual contract awards 300% and launched an accelerator commercializing government R&D. At Aegis Technologies, he built an R&D division and secured more than \$10 million in defense contracts. His earlier career in optics, lasers, terahertz systems, nanotechnology, and medical instrumentation produced multiple U.S. patents, including pioneering work in retinal imaging and vision correction, and brought a telemedicine tool for the early detection of vision problems in pre-verbal children to market. Along the way he grew a non-profit to \$60 million in annual revenue. He holds an M.Sc. in Physics (Summa Cum Laude) and a B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering (Magna Cum Laude) from the University of Memphis, and a Strategic Innovation Management certificate from Vanderbilt.

Today David is bringing three decades of this work — the science, the diplomacy, and the pedagogy — to Horizon Commons, extending his mission from space to the wider frontier of transformational technology. Horizon Commons applies the same principles that have shaped his career: that the challenges of this era are bigger than any one individual, that readiness is built by doing real missions in real community, and that technology matters most when it is deployed wisely, ethically, and in service of people.

His commitment to human flourishing reaches well beyond his professional life. He has launched a non-profit to advance education outcomes in Indigenous communities in Arizona, mentored emerging leaders, built a mentoring program in partnership with a police department, and supported adoption agencies and international outreach. An avid traveler, amateur photographer and musician, aspiring author, and outdoor enthusiast, David lives in the Phoenix area — guided in his work and his life by the same values: resilience, curiosity, teamwork, and a genuine care for people.