

Robert Bigelow (BICS)

Robert Bigelow (b 1945) is a billionaire American real estate and former space entrepreneur who has funded parapsychological and paranormal studies over three decades. He is the founder of the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS), which in recent years has awarded substantial sums for research on post-mortem survival.



Life, Education and Career

Robert Thomas Bigelow was born on 12 May 1945 and grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada, the son of a real-estate broker. He is quoted in *Forbes* as saying ‘This was a unique town because it was the only place where you could stand out in your yard and watch [rocket] launches or a nuclear bomb go off’. This and a vivid UFO sighting by his grandparents triggered his interest in space and the paranormal, so he planned from childhood to make his fortune in real estate so as to finance his own aerospace development. He studied banking and real estate at the University of Nevada, Reno and Arizona State University, graduating in 1967 with a BSc in business administration.^[1]

Starting with a ,000 loan, Bigelow began investing and then building rental apartment complexes, eventually founding [Budget Suites of America](#), a chain of week-by-week apartments in the southwest USA, designed to be affordable and convenient. All told he has built some 15,000 units and purchased 8,000 more.^[2] He also has owned, co-owned and served on the boards of a savings and loan company, a commercial bank and a mortgage company.^[3]

Bigelow founded Bigelow Aerospace (BA) in 1999, licensing technology for expandable modules from the USA’s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). BA launched two modules, Genesis I in 2006 and Genesis II in 2007, demonstrating that they were stable and could maintain air pressure. In 2013, the company contracted with NASA to build the Bigelow Expandable Activity Module (BEAM) and install it on the International Space Station. It was conveyed to the station on a SpaceX craft and installed in April and May 2016. It remains attached to the ISS to this day.^[4]

Bigelow next envisioned commercial hotels in space, and even set a schedule of prices, for example, .75 million for a 30-day stay.^[5] However NASA, which had been planning to offer a port on the ISS for a larger BA module, instead solicited bids, and Bigelow bowed out, saying greater government subsidization was needed.

BA has also been connected with two covert Pentagon programs researching [UFOs](#), a longstanding interest of Bigelow’s. He holds more than 15 US patents for inventions relating to space technology.^[6]

In March 2020, BA was ordered to suspend operations as a non-essential business due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as a result of which Bigelow laid off all but 20 of 155 employees.^[7] In March 2021, he pledged to rehire its staff once conditions improved.^[8]

Support for Parapsychology

Robert Bigelow has funded a wide variety of parapsychological initiatives in the past three decades.

In 1992, he offered a 'challenge grant' to support the [Journal of Scientific Exploration](#) (JSE), committing to match all subscriptions, sales and donations received by year's end dollar for dollar up to ,000. The amount was attained and JSE still thrives.^[9]

He supported the [Rhine Research Center](#), for which he had served as a director when it had been named the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man, as well as the Institute for Parapsychology and the [Journal of Parapsychology](#). He was named first on the Center's Benefactors' Roll in 1997.^[10]

In 1993, Bigelow provided a grant to found the Center for Advanced Cognitive Science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, its purpose to research the role of consciousness in the physical world through laboratory investigations. Its director was leading parapsychologist [Dean Radin](#).^[11] It later became the Consciousness Research Laboratory, a division of the university's Harry Reid Center for Environmental Studies, until it was closed in September 1997.^[12]

In 1995, Bigelow founded a private paranormal research organization, the National Institute of Discovery Science (NIDS), which remained active until 2004. Its chief field research director was Colm Kelleher.

In 1995, NIDS purchased a 480-acre ranch near Fort Duchesne in northeastern Utah, USA, colloquially known as 'Skinwalker Ranch'. It lies in the Uinta Basin, itself known for anomalous phenomena, and is reputed to be a particularly active area for paranormal phenomena such as poltergeist/haunting phenomena, animal disappearances, cattle mutilations and unusual aerial manifestations. NIDS staff and the family that previously owned the ranch both reported occurrences such as apparent portals in the sky, aircraft ranging in size from small to 'several football fields' in length that emitted light of various colours, and orbs, one of which reportedly incinerated three dogs that were chasing it. Kelleher and investigative journalist George Knapp published a book^[13] on these phenomena.^[14]

Bigelow donated .7 million to establish the Bigelow Chair of Consciousness Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1997, an annual appointment. It sustained for two years and its holders were parapsychologists [Charles Tart](#) and Raymond Moody, the latter of whom pioneered research in [near-death experiences](#).^[15]

Paranormal research that Bigelow has funded or helped fund includes:

- testing whether the focused attention of a group of people creates order in their environs, as measured by random number generators^[16]

- testing correlations between physiological states and local environmental states while subjects attempted to perceive apparitions in a [psychomanteum](#)^[17]
- testing [presentiment](#) in subjects whose physiological responses to emotion were measured before and after they viewed either 'calm' or 'extreme' photographs^[18]
- testing for correlations between payout percentages at a Las Vegas casino with gravitational tidal forces, the lunar cycle and geomagnetic field fluctuations, based on previous research showing effects of these forces on human psi^[19]
- using select physiological responses analyzed by artificial neural networks to test subjects' precognitive psi, so as to develop better techniques for psi training^[20]
- testing electrodermal activity as a physiological response to precognition in subjects viewing 'calm' or 'emotional' pictures^[21]
- three national surveys in the USA on the prevalence of recalled experiences and signs presumed to be related to alien abduction^[22]
- a project to preserve key phrases on an internet database, provided by people in the hope that after death they will be able to communicate the phrase to someone who can then test its authenticity on the website, based on a protocol conceived by Susy Smith, a spirit medium ^[23]

In a *New York Times* article, Bigelow attributed his and his wife Diane's original interest in the afterlife to the suicide, at age 24, of their son Rod Lee in 1992. His son Rod II, then an infant, committed suicide at age twenty. Shortly after their son's death, the couple held sittings with medium George Anderson to try to contact him, and felt comforted afterward.^[24]

Bigelow Institute of Consciousness Studies

In June of 2020, about four months after Diane Mona Bigelow's death ended his 55 years of marriage,^[25] Bigelow founded the Bigelow Institute of Consciousness Studies, 'to support research into both the survival of human consciousness after physical death and, based on data from such studies, the nature of the afterlife', according to its [website](#). It continues:

Despite intriguing evidence, the number of research groups and funding devoted to investigating the survival of human consciousness beyond death is shockingly small in the Western world. Even though all 7.8 billion humans on planet Earth will eventually die, very little high quality research is being conducted on perhaps the most important and fundamental question facing our species ...

One purpose of the BICS is to raise awareness among the public and within the scientific community of the importance and relevance of such an investigation. BICS hopes to provide a public service by drawing increasing attention to, and encouraging research into, this fundamental and timeless topic. We are seeking hard evidence 'beyond a reasonable doubt' that takes us beyond religion or philosophy and provides a body of knowledge to be brought widely

into the public arena that could be partially unifying in its impact on human awareness and culture.^[26]

Regarding the focus on post-mortem survival, Bigelow commented: ‘We felt that it was time to shift some attention to this very, very, very, important subject of survival of consciousness and let’s focus on that, and maybe we can help the community and the researchers.’^[27]

Essay Contest

BICS’s first project was an essay contest, launched in January 2021, which asked entrants to answer the question ‘What is the best evidence for the survival of human consciousness beyond permanent bodily death?’ in a maximum of 25,000 words, with the added requirement of ‘proof beyond a reasonable doubt’. Of about a thousand applicants, 204 were granted permission to enter.

Initially, cash prizes of 0,000, 0,000 and 0,000 were offered for first, second and third place respectively; during the writing period, another eleven prizes of ,000 each were added, and during the judging period another fifteen ,000 prizes were added, at the judges’ request, for a total of 29 winners splitting .8 million.

The judges were Christopher C Green, Leslie Kean, Jeffrey J Kripal, [Harold Puthoff](#), [Jessica Utts](#) and Brian Weiss, about all of whom information could be found on the BICS website’s [Contest Judges page](#). They along with Bigelow and Kelleher at that time comprised the BICS Board of Directors.

The winners were announced on 2 November. They were:

- First place: [Jeffrey Mishlove](#), American long-time parapsychologist and host of the YouTube channel [New Thinking Allowed](#)
- Second place: [Pim van Lommel](#), Dutch cardiologist and long-time NDE researcher
- Third place: [Leo Ruickbie](#), British social scientist, paranormal investigator, author and editor
- ,000: [Michael Tymn](#), [Stephen Braude](#), Nicolas Rouleau, Bernardo Kastrup, Elizabeth Krohn, Sharon Rawlette, Jeffrey Long, [Michael Nahm](#), [Julie Beischel](#), Alexandre Rocha *et al*, David Rousseau *et al*
- ,000: Robert Mays *et al*, Chris Carter, Steve Taylor, Christopher Kerr, [Bruce Leininger](#), Vernon Neppe, Helane Wahbeh *et al*, [Chris Roe](#) *et al*, Peter Fenwick *et al*, Walter Meyer zu Erpen, Akila Weerasekera and Shanaka de Silva, Greg Taylor, Nick Cook, [Andreas Sommer](#), Sam Parnia *et al*

All winning essays are posted on the Bigelow website [here](#). They present a wide variety of approaches and arguments. The awards ceremony took place in Las Vegas on 4 December 2021.^[28]

The Challenge

In 2022, BICS announced its second major project, ‘The Challenge’, a program that would make available up to million in grants available to researchers investigating

the possibilities and techniques of real-time communication with discarnate consciousnesses, with a focus on acquiring information on humankind's fate in the next twenty to thirty years.^[29]

The grants are divided into four projects of up to 0,000 and twelve projects of up to ,000. Project topics are divided into two, 'Communication' and 'Wisdom Acquisition'.

Projects falling under 'Communication' will investigate methodology for communicating with discarnate consciousnesses in the realm termed 'the other side' or 'the afterlife', not for contact by individuals with deceased loved ones, but for more general information. Possible methods include but are not limited to:

automatic writing, dreams, lucid dreaming, visions, veridical hallucination, trance, hypnosis, hypnotic regression, direct voice, mental mediumship, physical mediumship, so-called spirit boards, etc.^[30]

The second topic, 'Wisdom Acquisition', is described thus:

the reception of higher order information of value to humankind. As a guide, historical examples of such contact and communication with 'the afterlife' have included: Emanuel Swedenborg; Allan Kardec; William Stainton Moses; Edgar Cayce; and Jane Roberts.

As part of wisdom acquisition, BICS is interested in exploring and researching information obtained from authenticated sources on the 'Other Side' pertaining to addressing the future viability or non-viability of humankind over the next twenty to thirty years.

Preliminary proposals were accepted from 1 November 2022 to 1 February 2023; finalists will have until 1 April 2023 to submit full proposals, and the winning projects will be funded between 1 August 2023 and 1 May 2024.

Robert Bigelow writes on the BICS website:

BICS hopes that results from the first Challenge are going to be so productive and fascinating that we could expand greatly on future projects. There is potentially a lot more at stake.

Video

MysteryWire's ['dossier' on Robert Bigelow](#) contains multiple video interviews on various aspects of his career and life including BICS and the essay contest.

News3 Channel at WREG in Memphis [interviews Bigelow](#) about the contest.

MysteryWire [interviews Bigelow](#) after the contest about the winners, the impact and future plans.

KM Wehrstein

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- 1.^ Ewalt (2011).
- 2.^ Higginbotham (2013).
- 3.^ Las Vegas High School Alumni Association (n.d.).
- 4.^ Foust (2020).
- 5.^ Ewalt (2011).
- 6.^ Las Vegas High School Alumni Association (n.d.).
- 7.^ Blumenthal (2021).
- 8.^ Whittington (2021).
- 9.^ Haisch (1992, 1993).
- 10.^ Rhine Research Center (1997).
- 11.^ Society for Scientific Exploration (1994).
- 12.^ Bass (1997).
- 13.^ Kelleher & Knapp (2005).
- 14.^ McCue (2015).
- 15.^ Ruickbie (2021), 5.
- 16.^ Radin, Rebman, & Cross (1996).
- 17.^ Radin & Rebman (1996–1997).

18. ^ Radin (1997).
19. ^ Radin & Rebman (1998).
20. ^ Stevens (1998).
21. ^ Radin (2004).
22. ^ Hopkins, Jacobs & Westrum (2004)
23. ^ Fontana & Moore (2001). See Smith (2001). The website appears to be defunct.
24. ^ Blumenthal (2021).
25. ^ Blumenthal (2021).
26. ^ Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2021).
27. ^ Ruickbie (2021), 5.
28. ^ Ruffles (2021).
29. ^ Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2022). All information in this section is drawn from this source.
30. ^ Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2022). See FAQ.