



SOUTHERN PUBLIC RELATIONS FEDERATION

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

September 20-22, 2026
Tuscaloosa, Alabama



WELCOME

Welcome to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and to the 2026 Southern Public Relations Federation Conference!

It is always a pleasure to gather with other public relations professionals and colleagues, especially when so many have become friends over the years. You've traveled from across the region to give yourself a chance to learn and grow.

It's that growing part that feels especially appropriate this year as we celebrate, "Our PR Roots – Grounded in Legacy and Growing Forward."

Like almost every profession in 2026, the profession of public relations is changing at a remarkable pace – but even with new technology, changing media habits and more information at our fingertips than we've ever had before – the foundation of our profession, our roots, remain the same.

Our job is still to listen. And speak. To build trust. And provide wise counsel.

But most of all, our role is to guide our organizations through a world that's vastly different than one we've ever known. But while we hone our skills this week – taking in new ideas and learning from each other – I leave you with one additional challenge.

Look around.

We're thrilled to have a number of public relations educators and students joining us this year. Look for those students—and for anyone wearing a name tag indicating they are attending our conference for the first time.

Remember the first time YOU attended a conference?

We can be A LOT—in a good way, of course! And some may be uncertain about where they fit in. So, take the opportunity to say hello.

Invite someone to sit with you. Introduce yourself. Ask a student what they're interested in. Talk with someone from another chapter. Find out what another agency, organization or university is working on. And if you've been around SPRF for a while, remember that someone else may be experiencing their first conference the way you once did.

Connection is one of the most valuable souvenirs you'll take away from this conference.

The SPRF members sitting around you aren't just names on a membership list. We are colleagues who pick up the phone. Friends who ask for advice. And professionals who celebrate each other's wins.

That kind of connection is increasingly rare and increasingly valuable – so when you find an organization where that's the rule instead of the exception, I'd say it's worth putting down a few roots!

Enjoy the conference, make a few new connections and celebrate another great year of work and achievement!

Sincerely,
Sarah C. Clancy, APR



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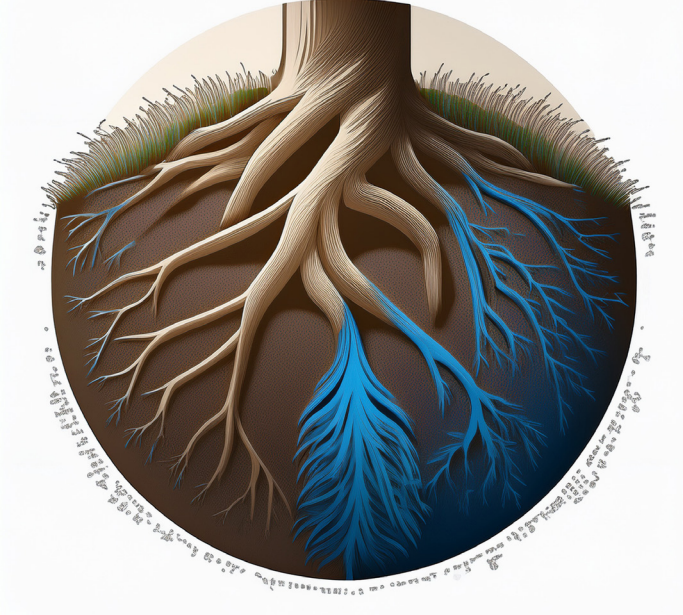
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The Southern Public Relations Federation is a network of public relations professionals from Alabama, North Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi who share a common interest in the public relations profession. Membership in the Federation is automatic for members of the Public Relations Council of Alabama (PRCA), the Emerald Coast Public Relations Organization (ECPRO), the Public Relations Association of Louisiana (PRAL), and the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM).

LEADERSHIP

2026 SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT

Sarah Clancy, APR, PRAL

PRESIDENT-ELECT/CONFERENCE CHAIR

Ginger Guttner, APR, PRAL

PAST PRESIDENT

Patrice Guilfoyle, APR, PRAM

SECRETARY

Tracy Sims, APR, PRCA

TREASURER

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ECPRO PRESIDENT

Kathy Morrow

UAB REPRESENTATIVE

Kristina Hendrix, APR, PRCA

UAB REPRESENTATIVE

Bill Moak, APR

SILENT AUCTION

CLAY ROOM

The SPRF Silent Auction proceeds go to the SPRF scholarships for college students. Get yourself some great merchandise while supporting our future colleagues.

- Include a cell phone number
- Bid increments must be in amounts of \$5 or more
- You must be present to accept your item or designate someone to pay and pick it up for you

LEADERSHIP

2026 SPRF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT-ELECT/CONFERENCE CHAIR

Ginger Guttner, APR, PRAL

SECRETARY AND EVALUATIONS CHAIR

Tracy Sims, APR, PRCA

LANTERNS CHAIR AND TREASURER

Micah Walker, APR, PRAL

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS CHAIR

Jan Schaefer, APR, PRAM

COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

Amanda Guillot, PRAL

STUDENT ACTIVITIES CHAIR

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Kristina Hendrix, APR, PRCA

UAB REPRESENTATIVE

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Krispin Nelson, PRCA

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LOCAL LIAISON AND PRCA PRESIDENT

Mikala McCurry, APR

DOOR PRIZES CHAIR AND PRAL PRESIDENT

Emerie Eck Holtzclaw

PRAM PRESIDENT

Morgan Shiyu

ECPRO PRESIDENT

Kathy Morrow

EVENT PLANNER AND SPRF ASSOCIATION ASSISTANT

Kayla Stefferud, PRAM

**THE IDEA IS NOT TO LIVE FOREVER BUT TO
CREATE SOMETHING THAT WILL.
~ ANDY WARHOL**

AGENDA AT A GLANCE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

1 - 6 PMA	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
1 - 4 PM	PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP: EMAIL AND TEXT MARKETING Sponsored by MailChimp and Covalent Logic Limited to 25 people	Murphy Room
2 - 4 PM	SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING	President's Room
4 - 5 PM	COUNCIL OF LEADERS MEETING	President's Room
4 - 5 PM	STUDENT KICKOFF	Murphy
6 - 8 PM	OPENING RECEPTION	Governor's Room

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

8 AM - 4 PM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
8 AM - 4 PM	SILENT AUCTION	Clay
8 - 9 AM	NETWORKING BREAKFAST	Pre-Function Area
9 - 10:30 AM	BUSINESS MEETING AND OPENING KEYNOTE GenZ and Me: Leading Tomorrow's Talent through Today's Generational Divide	Gayle Bagby Fitz
10:45 -11:45 AM	BREAKOUT A 1. APR Jump Start: The RPIE Process 2. Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR 3. Podcasting 101: How Two Government Podcasters Make It Work	President's Room Murphy Fitzpatrick
12 - 1:15 PM	HALL OF FAME LUNCH	Gayle Bagby Fitz
1:30 - 2:30 PM	BREAKOUT B 1. ADHD and ME: Maintaining Stakeholder Attention through Influence 2. Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR 3. The Robots are Coming for Your Clicks	Fitzpatrick Murphy President's Room
6 2:30 - 2:45 PM	BREAK	Pre-Function Area

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

2:45 - 3:45 PM

BREAKOUT C

1. Strengthen Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies Fitzpatrick
2. The Language of Discovery: Marketing Research in Engaging Ways Murphy
3. APR Jump Start: Applied PR Ethics and Law President's Room

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

9 - 10 AM

BREAKFAST AND INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLES

Foyer outside Gayle Bagby Fitz

9 AM - 6 PM

SILENT AUCTION

Clay

10 - 11:15 AM

GENERAL SESSION

Gayle Bagby Fitz

From Idea to Impact: Celebrating How Podcasting Connects Us to New and Wider Audiences

11:30 AM - 1 PM

RECOGNITION LUNCH

Gayle Bagby Fitz

1:15 - 2:15 PM

BREAKOUT D

1. Strengthen Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies Fitzpatrick
2. From 1 to 100 Million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform Murphy
3. APR Jump Start: Leading the PR Function and Relationship Management President's Room

2:15 - 2:30 PM

BREAK

Pre-Function Area

2:30 - 3:30 PM

BREAKOUT E

1. From 1 to 100 Million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform Murphy
2. APR Jump Start: The Panel Presentation and Portfolio Review* President's Room
3. Storytelling: The Soul of the City Fitzpatrick

3:45 - 4:45 PM

STUDENT FINAL PRESENTATIONS

President's Room

5 - 6 PM

RECEPTION

Governor's Room

6:30 - 8:30 PM

LANTERN AWARDS AND DINNER

Gayle Bagby Fitz

**APR Panel and Portfolio Review will end when completed*

DETAILED AGENDA

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

1 - 6 PM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
1 - 4 PM	PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP: FOUNDATIONS IN EMAIL MARKETING Sponsored by MailChimp and Covalent Logic Limited to 25 people Foundations in Email Marketing - 90 minutes If you're new to email marketing and looking to understand the basics so you can effectively communicate with your audience, this workshop is for you. Or if you want to look at the fundamentals of audience building, list segmentation and building a great email. During this workshop, we will cover: • Learning the basics of email marketing and how to communicate effectively with subscribers • Tips on how craft an email that works for you • Building and sending an email together in real-time • Best practices for a successful email marketing strategy Advanced Email Marketing: Make the most of text marketing & automatic customer journeys - 90 minutes In today's world, customers expect real-time, personalized communication, an automated email and SMS process offers a direct, immediate way to engage audiences. Dive into the art of SMS marketing or elevate your SMS marketing skills and delve deeper into sophisticated strategies such as audience building, streamlined messaging, and the seamless integration of email and SMS. Get a practical foundation in Customer Journey Automation Flows. You'll learn how flows can work, how rules and actions shape the experience, and how to build and review a flow that's ready to activate.	Murphy
2 - 4 PM	SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING	President's Room
4 - 5 PM	COUNCIL OF LEADERS MEETING	President's Room
4 - 5 PM	STUDENT KICKOFF	Murphy
6 - 8 PM	OPENING RECEPTION	Governor's Room

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

8 AM - 4 PM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
8 AM - 4 PM	SILENT AUCTION	Clay
8 - 9 AM	NETWORKING BREAKFAST	
8:30 AM	PRESIDENT'S WELCOME	Gayle Bagby Fitz
9 - 10:30 AM	BUSINESS MEETING AND KEYNOTE GenZ and Me: Leading Tomorrow's Talent through Today's Generational Divide Dan Farkas Everyone wants their business to branch out and their team's roots to grow. Why doesn't it happen? It's generational. Leaders now balance five generations of office influence in one messy generational sandwich: Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, and Zoomers. Gen Z and Me will help attendees cut through the clutter to find unity that grows teams and empowers talent. The roots of success will branch into past practices, timely innovation, and examples for any work setting. We'll then see how to measure success internally and externally.	Gayle Bagby Fitz
10:45 - 11:45 AM	BREAKOUT A APR Jump Start: The RPIE Process Lori Miller, APR Demystify the absolute "heavy hitter" of the Accreditation journey. This session breaks down the critical four-step framework—Research, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation—proving how a disciplined, research-driven approach protects your budget, reduces uncertainty, and aligns with your organization's core business goals.	President's Room
	Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR Angela Levins A communication strategy is the backbone of any campaign. Creating that strategy doesn't just happen at your desk. The crafting of a communication strategy starts with talking to those involved in a project, and often those involved do not have a background in PR. So, how do you bridge the gap to create a successful communication strategy. By end of session, attendees will have a stronger understanding of developing your communications strategy for a campaign with the help of project leaders. This includes developing goals, objectives, budget, timeline, and audience.	Murphy

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

10:45 -11:45 AM	Podcasting 101: How Two Government Podcasters Make It Work Paul Wolf, Paul Katool, and Sophie McNeil Wolf, APR Think government agencies aren't in the podcasting game? Think again! In this session, two podcasting professionals from the public sector will share their unique approaches to launching and managing a podcast - one with a full in-person studio setup and the other recording entirely remotely. Whether you're considering starting a podcast for your organization or just curious about the process, this discussion will cover the basics of audio production, equipment considerations, and practical tips for getting started. Walk away with the knowledge and confidence to turn your podcast idea into reality - no matter your budget or setup!	Fitzpatrick
12 - 1:15 PM	HALL OF FAME LUNCH	Gayle Bagby Fitz
1:30 - 2:30 PM	BREAKOUT B ADHD and ME: Maintaining Stakeholder Attention through Influence Dan Farkas Attention is a precious commodity far too easily stolen. Fifty-seven (57) percent of Americans consider themselves "addicted" to their smartphones. Americans now spend over 4 hours and 25 minutes a day on their phones. The average person checks their phone 150 times a day. How do we reverse this flywheel? Attention to Influence. ADHD and Me will explain the science of dwindling attention. We'll then explain how the neuroscience of ADHD can help communicators reverse digital distraction without necessarily removing technology. We'll finally see how modern trends with influencer relations can help spark understanding, adoption, and meaningful engagement.	Fitzpatrick
1:30 - 2:30 PM	Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR Angela Levins A communication strategy is the backbone of any campaign. Creating that strategy doesn't just happen at your desk. The crafting of a communication strategy starts with talking to those involved in a project, and often those involved do not have a background in PR. So, how do you bridge the gap to create a successful communication strategy. By end of session, attendees will have a stronger understanding of developing your communications strategy for a campaign with the help of project leaders. This includes developing goals, objectives, budget, timeline, and audience.	Murphy

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

1:30 - 2:30 PM	The Robots are Coming for Your Clicks: How to Stay Relevant in AI-Driven World Robin McKinney, APR Search is no longer just about rankings. AI platforms like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews now generate answers that shape brand perception without users ever clicking a link. This session explains how AI-driven search works and why public relations plays a critical role in brand discoverability. Attendees will learn how strong PR foundations — credible content, authority, and strategic messaging — directly influence whether their brand appears in AI-generated answers. Participants will leave with practical strategies they can immediately apply to strengthen brand visibility, credibility, and influence in AI-mediated search environments.	President's Room
2:30 - 2:45 PM	BREAK	Pre-Function Area
2:45 - 3:45 PM	BREAKOUT C Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D. and Stephanie Pettis, APR, CPRC Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies Experienced PR professionals know the value of key communication principles, such as situational awareness, environmental scanning and stakeholder listening. They have crisis communication plans to guide them when things go wrong. But how many employ strategies that identify and address emotional distress among their stakeholders when a crisis hits? This session demonstrates how a trauma-informed approach to crisis communication can support the emotional and mental health needs of your team while also supporting message development and engagement with external stakeholders. The speakers will share resources to complement crisis PR strategies and identify signs that you or your colleagues need support.	Fitzpatrick
2:45 - 3:45 PM	APR Jump Start: Applied PR Ethics and Law Lisa Frazier, APR True strategic counselors serve as the ethical conscience of their organizations. Learn how to successfully steer through complex legal and ethical "grey" areas. This class covers essential exam pillars, including First Amendment protections, privacy standards (such as HIPAA and FERPA), copyright, trademark, and the PRSA Code of Ethics.	President's Room

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

2:45 - 3:45 PM

The Language of Discovery: Marketing Research in Engaging Ways

Murphy

[Karyn Brown, APR](#), [Sam Kealhofer](#), and [Sarah Nicholas](#)

Effective research communication requires more than translating technical findings—it requires storytelling, context, and genuine connection. This session explores practical strategies for making scholarship resonate with broader audiences. Participants will learn how to highlight the human motivations and personal journeys behind research, connect discoveries to current events, and present complex ideas through accessible narratives. The session also examines multi-platform engagement, including news releases, magazine features, podcasts, and broadcast interviews. Finally, it offers examples of informal, community-centered events that invite dialogue between researchers and audiences. Together, these approaches help transform research communication from one-way dissemination into meaningful, memorable public engagement.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

9 - 10 AM

BREAKFAST AND INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLES

9 AM - 6 PM

SILENT AUCTION

Clay

10 - 11:15 AM

GENERAL SESSION

Gayle Bagby Fitz

From Idea to Impact: Celebrating How Podcasting Connects Us to New and Wider Audiences

[Rebecca Todd Minder](#)

Learn how mission-driven podcasting expands reach and engages younger audiences. This session covers the journey from concept to execution, sharing real-world successes, failures, and surprises. Attendees will gain practical strategies to build authentic connections, avoid common pitfalls, and grow their digital presence through actionable, experience-based guidance.

11:30 AM - 1 PM

RECOGNITION LUNCH

Gayle Bagby Fitz

1:15 - 2:15 PM

BREAKOUT D

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies

Gayle Bagby Fitz

[J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D.](#) and [Stephanie Pettis, APR, CPRC](#)

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies
Experienced PR professionals know the value of key communication principles, such as situational awareness, environmental scanning and stakeholder listening. They have crisis communication plans to guide them when things go wrong. But how many employ strategies that identify and address emotional distress among their stakeholders when a crisis hits? This session demonstrates how a trauma-informed approach to crisis communication can support the emotional and mental health needs of your team while also supporting message development and engagement with external stakeholders. The speakers will share resources to complement crisis PR strategies and identify signs that you or your colleagues need support.

From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform

Murphy

[Thomas Broadus](#) and [Sarah Triplett](#)

Mississippi State University transformed its social media from a traditional news outlet into a high performing digital storytelling engine, generating 132 million organic impressions and rising more than 150 spots to No. 13 nationally in engagement rankings. With zero paid media, a two person team leveraged research driven strategy, authentic campus storytelling, and platform specific video optimization to double follower growth goals and achieve \$4.6 million in earned media value. This session outlines the research, planning, execution, and evaluation framework that fueled measurable, national impact through organic, algorithm aligned content.

APR Jump Start: Leading the PR Function and Relationship Management

President's Room

[Mikala McCurry, APR](#)

Modern communication professionals must understand business drivers, organizational governance, and corporate risk—not just media tactics. This session builds your business literacy by examining organizational structures, budgeting, resource management, and strategic consensus-building across complex stakeholder networks.

2:30 - 2:45 PM

BREAK

Pre-Function Area

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

2:30 - 3:30 PM

BREAKOUT E

From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform

Murphy

[Thomas Broadus](#) and [Sarah Triplett](#)

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APR Jump Start: APR Q&A Panel

President's Room

[Mikala McCurry](#), [APR](#), and [Susan Poole](#), [APR](#)

The Panel Presentation evaluates your strategic judgment in ways a computer-based exam cannot. In this interactive, low-pressure workshop, candidates will separate into small break-out tables to walk through their specific public relations case study ideas one-on-one with an accredited mentor. You will receive personalized feedback on your portfolio structure, questionnaire approach, and presentation style to ensure you are fully prepared to advance.

Note to Candidates: To maximize your hands-on time during Tuesday's workshop, please bring a rough outline or questionnaire draft of a complete campaign you have significantly contributed to. If interest is high, additional post-conference practice panels may be scheduled to ensure every candidate receives individual mentorship.

**“PERFECTION IS ACHIEVED NOT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING MORE
TO ADD, BUT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO TAKE AWAY.”
~ ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY**

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

2:30 - 3:30 PM

Storytelling: The Soul of the City Paul Wolf

Fitzpatrick

Every PR professional knows the challenge: your organization has a compelling story, but the loudest headlines aren't yours to write. In this breakout session, Paul Wolf of Visit Jackson shares how a disciplined, storytelling-first content strategy can help communications teams reclaim the narrative, build audience trust, and create content that actually moves people. Drawing on real campaigns from one of the South's most misunderstood cities, Paul walks attendees through a practical framework for producing content that spreads organically across channels. From emotionally resonant community profiles to interactive audience engagement campaigns and consistent brand-building, every example is grounded in work that had a measurable impact. PR pros will leave with seven actionable principles for strengthening their content practice. Whether you're communicating for a destination, a brand, a nonprofit, or a public agency, the storytelling fundamentals are the same, and this session will show you how to put them to work.

3:45 - 4:45 PM

STUDENT FINAL PRESENTATIONS

President's Room

5 - 6 PM

RECEPTION

Governor's Room

6:30 - 8:30 PM

LANTERN AWARDS AND DINNER

Gayle Bagby Fitz

**"IF I HAD ASKED PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANTED,
THEY WOULD HAVE SAID FASTER HORSES."
~ HENRY FORD**

SPRF MEMBER BENEFITS

As a member of the Southern Public Relations Federation, we trust your membership is valuable. Our goal is to enhance this value yearly. We want to remind you of your member benefits, including:

- Professional Code of Ethics
- Online membership database with extensive networking opportunities
- Annual conference
- Professional development webinars
- Opportunity to earn Accreditation in Public Relations (APR)
- Accreditation subsidies
- Professional resource library
- Membership survey data
- Representation on the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB)
- Local, state, and regional leadership opportunities
- Exclusive SPRF news, information, and job openings
- Chapter use of Open Water and other association tools
- Awards with professional feedback

STATES AND CHAPTERS

[Emerald Coast Public Relations Organization](#)

[Public Relations Association of Louisiana](#)

- PRAL Baton Rouge
- PRAL Central
- PRAL Northwest

[Public Relations Council of Alabama](#)

- PRCA Birmingham
- PRCA East Alabama
- PRCA Mobile
- PRCA Montgomery
- PRCA North Alabama
- PRCA West Alabama

[Public Relations Association of Mississippi](#)

- PRAM Central
- PRAM Gulf Coast
- PRAM Mississippi Beach
- PRAM Northeast
- PRAM Oxford/Ole Miss
- PRAM Pine Belt
- PRAM River City
- PRAM Starkville/MSU

SOUTHERN PUBLIC RELATIONS HALL OF FAME

The Southern Public Relations Hall of Fame was established in 2010 to recognize the distinguished accomplishments, commitment, and leadership of professional public relations practitioners and educators from the southeastern United States, thereby promoting the PR profession. Inductees are current and former Southern public relations practitioners or educators who have brought honor to the PR field. Induction into the Hall of Fame is designed to recognize leaders in our industry who have made extraordinary achievements, accomplishments, and contributions to their organizations, communities, and the public relations profession. Co-sponsored by the Southern Public Relations Federation and the Mississippi State University Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre, the Hall of Fame is permanently installed outside the John Grisham Room in the Mitchell Memorial Library on the campus of Mississippi State University in Starkville. SPRF publishes profiles of each member of the Hall of Fame on its website, sprf.org.

HALL OF FAME MEMBERS

2025

Bill Moak, APR, Fellow PRSA
Lisa Darnell Frazier, APR
Mara Hartmann, APR
Tracy R. Sims, APR

2024

Kristie Aylett, APR, Fellow PRSA
Mary Cracchiolo, APR
Rick Looser
Jae-Hwa Shin, Ph.D., MPH, MBA, APR
Garland Stansell, MPPM, APR
George Winters, APR

2023

Caron Blanton, APR

2022

Marian R. Faulk, APR
Jennifer Jenkins, APR COL
Christian Patterson, APR+M, Fellow PRSA

2021

Melissa LaBorde, APR
Bob Johannessen

2019

Dr. Paula F. Furr
Patricia Yunker Hartman, APR
Stafford Wood, APR

2018

Elizabeth Gregory North
Donna Ritchey, APR

2017

Harold Burson, APR, Fellow PRSA
Checky Herrington, APR, Fellow PRSA
Bettie Warren Hudgens

2016

Daniel Gardner Eva Golson
John S. Hightower, APR
Steve Renfroe
Joseph V. Trahan III Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA

2015

Charles Barnette, APR
Allegra Brigham, APR
Suzanne Fornaro, APR
Betsy Ann Plank, APR, Fellow PRSA

2014

John E. Forde, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA
Joseph W. Purka
Philip Shirley, APR
Sheila White

2013

Neal W. Cirlot
Betsie Gambel
Carol A. Mann, APR
Charles "Chuck" Saucier
John Wittig, Ph.D., APR

2012

Ron Council
Ken Hair

2011

Sherry Harlow, APR
William E. "Bud" Kirkpatrick
Yvonne McGehee Sorge, APR

2010

Philip R. Forrest, Jr.
Rex Kelly
William "Bill" Michelet

SOUTHERN PUBLIC RELATIONS HALL OF FAME

REBECCA TODD MINDER

Rebecca Todd Minder is a storyteller, community leader, and advocate for preserving and sharing Alabama's history and culture. As Director of Alabama Heritage, the award-winning quarterly magazine devoted to the state's rich heritage, she leads strategic planning, fundraising, partnerships, and public engagement initiatives while working to make Alabama's stories accessible and meaningful to new generations. Since joining the organization in 2012, she has helped guide its growth through innovative programming, digital media initiatives, and statewide outreach efforts.

Throughout her career, Rebecca has combined a passion for history with a commitment to community service and civic engagement. Beyond her work with Alabama Heritage, she has played a significant role in projects that preserve and elevate the stories of Alabama's Civil Rights Movement. Her involvement with the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Foundation has included initiatives that honor the courage and sacrifice of local changemakers, expand public awareness of civil rights history, and strengthen connections between communities and their shared past. She has also contributed to efforts that helped establish and promote a Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Trail, creating opportunities for residents and visitors alike to engage with important chapters of Alabama's history.



Rebecca's commitment to public history extends into documentary storytelling. She helped develop and produce an award-winning civil rights documentary that brought overlooked stories to broader audiences, demonstrating the power of media to educate, inspire, and preserve historical memory. Whether through print, film, digital platforms, or public programs, she believes storytelling can create meaningful dialogue and foster understanding across generations.

Her dedication to service is also reflected in her extensive volunteer and philanthropic work with local organizations and nonprofits such as Public Radio, Public Television, and her church's food pantry. Rebecca has generously shared her leadership, communication expertise, and strategic vision with community groups focused

on education, culture, civic engagement, and quality of life. Her ability to bring people together around a common purpose has strengthened numerous initiatives and helped organizations expand their impact throughout the region.

A graduate of The University of Alabama's American Studies program and College of Communication and Information Sciences, Rebecca remains deeply committed to mentoring future leaders and storytellers. She serves as an adviser to the digital media team for Mosaic, the University of Alabama Honors College's student-produced magazine, helping students develop skills in communication, creativity, and leadership.

Recognized for her collaborative spirit, dedication to service, and unwavering belief in the value of preserving history, Rebecca has devoted her career to connecting people through stories. Her leadership, community involvement, and commitment to cultural preservation continue to leave a lasting impact across Alabama.

Rebecca is honored to be recognized among a distinguished group of leaders whose work, service, and commitment have made a lasting difference in their communities and professions.

JAN SCHAEFER, APR

Jan Schaefer, APR, is an accredited and award-winning public relations professional whose career spans more than three decades of strategic communication, public service and leadership.

Schaefer serves as communications director for the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, where she leads internal and external communications, advises executive leadership and develops communication strategies supporting public education and environmental stewardship throughout Mississippi.

Her career includes senior public relations roles with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Mississippi Attorney General's Office and Mississippi Department of Public Safety. She has led her own public relations consultancy and began her career as a news producer at WLBT-TV in Jackson, where she also served as assistant to the Public Affairs Director.



SOUTHERN PUBLIC RELATIONS HALL OF FAME

Throughout her career, Schaefer has used strategic communication to address identified needs, build mutually beneficial relationships and create lasting impact. She helped launch Mississippi ABLE, which enables Mississippians with disabilities to save for their futures without jeopardizing essential benefits. She also created P.R.O.M. (Please Return on Monday), a statewide public safety initiative that has reached thousands of high school students by illustrating the full consequences of distracted driving, including lifelong disability and its impact on survivors and their families. Her work also includes Fear Stops Here, an anti-cyberbullying initiative developed to educate and empower Mississippi students.

Schaefer's work has earned numerous awards from the Public Relations Association of Mississippi and Southern Public Relations Federation. She was also named the 2024 SPRF Senior Practitioner and the 2023 PRAM Central Advanced Practitioner of the Year.

A member of PRAM and SPRF since 2008, Schaefer has held leadership roles at the chapter, state and regional levels, including president of PRAM Central, vice president of awards for PRAM and member-at-large on the SPRF board. She has served as a speaker at both SPRF and PRAM conferences and has judged professional awards programs for both. Through teaching public relations courses at Belhaven and Tulane universities and supervising internships throughout her career, she has taught or mentored more than 100 students and interns.

Schaefer's lifelong volunteer service has focused especially on causes that protect children and strengthen communities. Her service includes seven years of leadership with the Mississippi Human Trafficking Council, including chairing its Outreach and Awareness Committee, as well as currently serving as chair of the Mississippi Litter Prevention Task Force for the Office of the First Lady.

Schaefer holds a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Southern Mississippi. While working full time and raising four children, she earned a master's degree in communication from Mississippi College—graduating Summa Cum Laude. She earned her Accreditation in Public Relations in 2023.

At MDEQ, Schaefer developed the public relations strategy supporting the designation of Mississippi Opal as the official state gemstone. The legislation passed with unanimous support from state lawmakers in 2023. Extending that accomplishment and her commitment to storytelling and education, she is the author of the forthcoming Miss Opal Shares Her Sparkle, an educational children's book scheduled for publication by Pelican Publishing in spring 2027.

A native of Byram, Schaefer resides in Madison with her husband, Terry Hedgepeth, and is the proud mother of four children: Schaefer, Blake, Kalli and Drew.

ROBIN STREET, APR, M.A., M.S.

Robin Street, APR, retired from the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi after teaching more than 30 years, specializing in public relations. She continued to serve as an adjunct online professor until December 2025.

Students often praised her passions for teaching and for helping students. Many former students credit her with preparing them for their PR professions. Hundreds of them have written her thank-you notes for her lessons, compassion and inspiration. One former faculty member said of Street, “(She) is one those rare educators who can blow wind under the wings of our students.”

Her online PR classes won the University-wide award for best online class in 2017. Her teaching career was honored by the University in April 2026 with the first-ever “IMC Distinction in Service” award for, “a faculty member who has had a profound effect on SJNM IMC students.” In presenting the award, the Dean of the School said that as she travels to meet with alumni, she keeps hearing two words from them. “Robin Street.”



Street co-founded the Oxford, Miss., Chapter of PRAM and served that chapter in every officer position. PRAM and SPRF both selected her as Educator of the Year in 2009 and then as Professional of the Year in 2014.

In the PRAM Prism and SPRF Lantern competitions, Street was recognized 30 times, including winning Best in Show and Judges Choice twice. More than 100 of her students have won awards in the student PRAM competition. Every student “Best in Show” award given by PRAM before her retirement went to her students,

Nationally, Street led student teams to win the PRSA Silver Anvil award in 2018 and the runner-up award in 2012 for their internal campaigns. In Mississippi, Lifetime Television and Baptist Health Services named her a “Strong Woman Mentor.”

She also was a freelance journalist specializing in health and mental health topics. Her national publications include articles in Woman’s Day, Better Homes & Gardens, and Cooking Light. She has written health articles for multiple newspapers including more than 80 for The (Jackson, Miss.) Clarion Ledger. Street holds a M.A. degree in Journalism and a M.S. degree in Wellness, both from Ole Miss.

SPRF PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Each year, SPRF member organizations (ECPRO, PRAL, PRAM, and PRCA) are invited to nominate one outstanding public relations professional for the SPRF Professional Achievement Award, formerly known as the Practitioner of the Year. The recipient of this award is announced at the SPRF annual conference. SPRF established this award to recognize an individual who has continually demonstrated the highest ideals of the profession and a commitment to advance the profession of public relations.

- **BE A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING**
- **HAS TAUGHT OR PRACTICED IN THE FIELD OF PR FOR A MINIMUM OF 15 YEARS**
- **HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CHAPTER, STATE, AND/OR SPRF FOR MULTIPLE YEARS**
- **HAS PARTICIPATED IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN OTHER PROFESSIONAL OR PREPROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**
- **HAS PARTICIPATED IN PR COMMUNITY SERVICE**
- **HAS REALIZED RECOGNIZED SUCCESS IN THE PRACTICE OF PR DURING THE INDIVIDUAL'S CAREER**
- **HAS RECEIVED ACCREDITATION BY A UAB MEMBER ORGANIZATION**



SPRF PAA RECIPIENTS

2025: Kim Foster Collins, APR - PRAM

2024: Caron Blanton, APR - PRAM

2023: Mara Hartman, APR - PRAM

2022: Matt Martin, APR - PRAM

2021: Tracy Heggins Yanez, APR - PRAM

2020: Lesley Bruinton, APR - PRCA

2019: Checky Herrington, APR, FELLOW
PRSA PRAM

2018: Col. Christian Patterson, APR+M,
FELLOW PRSA - PRAM

2017: Tracie G. Bertaut, APR - PRAL

2016: Kristina Hendrix, APR - PRCA

2015: Holly Houk Cullen, APR - PRAL

2014: Robin Street, APR - PRAM

2013: Mary Cracchiolo Spain, APR -
PRAM

2012: Lea Ivey Stone, APR - PRAM

2011: Jennifer Jenkins, APR - PRCA

2010: Susan Broussard, APR - PRAL

2009: Kristie Aylett, APR, FELLOW PRSA
- PRAM

2008: Glen Duncan, APR - PRAL

2007: Denise D'Oliveira, APR - PRCA

2006: Suzanne Fornaro, APR - PRCA

2005: Michael Tullier, APR - PRCA

2004: Carol Mann, APR - PRCA

2003: Missy LaBorde, APR - PRAL

2002: Delia Adams Taylor, APR - PRAL

2001: Deirdre McGowan, PH.D., APR,
CAE - PRAM

2000: Sherry Harlow, APR - ECPRO

1999: John Forde, Ph.D., APR, FELLOW
PRSA PRAM

1998: Bill Todd, APR - PRCA

1997: Dave Rickey, APR - PRCA

1996: Karla Shackleford Conway, APR -
PRCA

1995: Jamie Palmer, APR - PRCA

1994: Rosemary W. Blackmon, APR -
PRCA

1993: Bill Michelet, APR, FELLOW PRSA
- PRAL

1992: Philip Shirley, APR - PRAM

1991: Peri Wiedener, APR - PRCA

PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD NOMINEE

Tricia Webb Grayson, APR, is a strategic communications leader with more than 30 years of experience helping organizations build trust, strengthen relationships and navigate change through effective communication. Her career has spanned journalism, healthcare, education, nonprofit leadership and professional services, with a consistent focus on using strategic communication to help organizations connect with the people they serve.



Accredited in Public Relations (APR), Tricia is an active leader within the profession, serving as Vice President of Continuing Education and APR Chair for PRAL Northwest and Communications Committee Chair for the Bayou Chapter of the Ozark Society. She is also an Executive Committee member of the Shreveport Journalism Foundation, where she supports journalism education and scholarship programs.

Throughout her career, Tricia has earned recognition at the regional, state and national levels, including the 2026 Public Relations Association of Louisiana Professional Achievement Award, two PRAL Northwest Beacon Awards of Excellence, the 2025 ATHENA Leadership Award Honoree recognition, Southern Public Relations Federation Senior Practitioner Designation, National School Public Relations Association awards, and the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credential.

Outside of work, Tricia is passionate about conservation, the outdoors and lifelong learning. A Louisiana Master Naturalist, she volunteers to promote environmental stewardship through community cleanups, educational outreach and outdoor programs. She is active with Sisters on the Fly and Sister Corps, helping introduce women to outdoor recreation while supporting conservation and community service projects.

Tricia and her husband have been married for 26 years and are the proud parents of two adult children. When she's not working or volunteering, you'll likely find her hiking, camping or curled up with a good historical fiction novel. She believes the most meaningful work leaves organizations, communities and natural places better than they were found.

PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD NOMINEE

Abby Guasti, APR, discovered early in her career that she loved both the strategy and the pace of public relations. What began as a passion for strategic problem solving and communications quickly evolved into a career built on helping organizations navigate change, strengthen relationships, and communicate with purpose.

As Founder and Principal of Simple Complexity, Abby provides strategic communications counsel to organizations across healthcare, manufacturing, education, nonprofit, and government-related sectors.

She partners with executive leaders to align communications with organizational goals, build trust with key stakeholders, and navigate opportunities and challenges with clarity and confidence. Among her most significant engagements is serving as communications counsel to the Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering (ASCTE), where she has helped elevate the school's reputation as a national leader in cyber and technology education.

An Accredited (APR) practitioner, Abby is committed to research-based strategy, ethical counsel, and lifelong learning. She has served in leadership roles at the chapter, state, and regional levels; mentored emerging professionals; supported Accreditation through Readiness Reviews and candidate coaching; judged professional awards; and spoken to students and practitioners on strategic communications and professional development. In 2026, she was honored with the Public Relations Council of Alabama's Philip R. Forrest Jr. Professional Achievement Award in recognition of her career contributions to the profession.

Outside of her professional work, Abby enjoys investing in future leaders, serving her community, and spending time with her husband, Courtney, and their two children, Harper and Hadley. They remain her most honest focus group, keeping her grounded, reminding her what matters, and ensuring she never takes herself too seriously.



PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD NOMINEE

Sophie McNeil Wolf, APR, loves the intersection of community, quality of life and storytelling, which has informed much of her work. In fact, as a child, she was pegged as the “first to know it and the first to tell it.”

As a communications professional and storyteller, Wolf has worked for nearly 20 years to help organizations quantify and share their impact through traditional and digital media. An accomplished writer, editor, and content creator, her skills include photography, video, social media management, graphic design, SEO, digital ADA accessibility, and strategic communications planning. The secret sauce of integrated marketing communications - creating compelling touchpoint strategies while upholding brand standards - is paramount to her work.

Her communication interests intersect her my love for community and synergy. For more than fifteen years, she has worked to promote cities, institutions, and neighborhoods, particularly as creative, innovative destinations to improve quality of life. Wolf currently serves as the Director of Communications and Insights for the Community Foundation for Mississippi. She has previously worked for organizations such as Visit Jackson, Millsaps College, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and Mississippi Public Broadcasting. Her work has appeared in Sports Illustrated, Wall Street Journal, Mississippi Magazine and Jackson Free Press.

Wolf holds a bachelor's degree in journalism with an emphasis in news-editorial from the University of Southern Mississippi, a master's degree in integrated marketing communications from the University of Mississippi and a graduate certificate in economic development from the University of Southern Mississippi. She is a 2014 graduate of the Millsaps College Business Advantage Program and 2018-2019 graduate of Leadership Greater Jackson. In 2024, she earned her Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) from the Universal Accreditation Board. She is also a certified Master Gardener through the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Wolf was the 2024 president of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi, Central Chapter and currently serves at the Senior Member at Large for the chapter. She also serves her industry in other capacities as the co-VP of Programming for the Public Relations of Mississippi and the VP of Professional Development for the Southern Public Relations Federation. She is a former board member of Leadership Greater Jackson and past president of the College Public Relations Association of Mississippi. Wolf is also part of the duo behind popular media brand Find It In Fondren, highlighting Jackson's hip arts district, with her husband, Paul Wolf.



Are you ready to elevate your career?

It's time to earn your

APR

As a skilled public relations professional, you know that your success is dependent on staying relevant, resourceful, and inspired. APR preparation ensures you have the tools to properly navigate challenging communication responsibilities, the vision to execute a larger strategy, and the expertise to be a thought-leader. Speak to your local APR chair and visit sprf.org to learn more about the APR certification.

Don't Forget! All SPRF members can request up to \$100 reimbursement after successful completion of the exam.



SENIOR PRACTITIONERS

The Senior Practitioner designation was established to honor SPRF members who are recognized by their peers as veteran public relations professionals with high ethical standing. Nomination and selection are made by their local chapter based on criteria set by the Federation. Each chapter can nominate up to two members per year for recognition as Senior Practitioners at the annual SPRF conference. To receive the designation “Senior Practitioner,” a recipient must qualify in three of the four criteria.

- **15 YEARS OF FULL-TIME PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERIENCE**
- **ACCREDITATION BY A UAB MEMBER ORGANIZATION**
- **OFFICER OR BOARD MEMBER AT CHAPTER, STATE, OR SPRF LEVEL**
- **RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALISM AS EVIDENCED BY SUCH AWARDS AS PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR, LANTERN AWARD, OR A SIMILAR HONOR**

2026 SENIOR PRACTITIONERS

Erin Coggins, PRCA

Sara Custer, PRCA

Shane Dorrill, PRCA

Allison Duke, PRCA

Amanda Guillot, PRAL

Rebecca Todd Minder, PRCA

Wendy Reeves, PRCA

Sophie McNeil Wolf, APR, PRAM

YOUNG PRACTITIONERS

The Young Practitioner designation was established to honor SPRF members who are recognized by their peers as junior public relations professionals with high ethical standing. SPRF member organizations (ECPRO, PRAL, PRAM, and PRCA) can name up to one member each year to be recognized as the Junior Practitioner at the annual SPRF conference. Nomination and selection are made by local chapters based on criteria set by the Federation. Those recognized receive a framed certificate. To receive the designation “Distinguished Young Practitioner,” a recipient must qualify in three of the four criteria.

- **MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS; MAXIMUM OF TEN YEARS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERIENCE**
- **ACCREDITATION BY A UAB MEMBER ORGANIZATION OR THE CERTIFICATE IN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**
- **EVIDENCE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AT THE CHAPTER, STATE, OR SPRF LEVEL**
- **RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALISM AS EVIDENCED BY A PROFESSIONAL AWARD SUCH AS LANTERN AWARDS OR A SIMILAR HONOR**

2026 YOUNG PRACTITIONERS

Christian Baker, PRCA

Savannah Taunton, PRCA

Ashley Williams, PRCA



STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Chloe Martin is a graduate student pursuing her Master of Science in Public Relations at The University of Southern Mississippi. She is an alumna of Mississippi State University, and serves as the PRSSA International Vice President of Chapter Development and President of the University of Southern Mississippi's Communication Graduate Association.



Reagan Paulus is a recent graduate from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and is now beginning her Master of Arts in Advertising and Public Relations program at the University of Alabama. Reagan previously worked as Communications and Marketing Assistant for The Scout Guide Huntsville and is now the Graduate Assistant for The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations.



Congratulations to our SPRF Student Scholarship Winner, Carla Serrano Gil!

A senior at LSU Alexandria, Carla has maintained a 4.0 GPA while pursuing degrees in communication and business administration. Beyond the classroom, Carla has distinguished herself through campus leadership, mentoring, sports, volunteer service, and professional development. Originally from Spain, Carla hopes to build a career grounded in connection, strategic communication, and community impact. As account executive for the student-led PR Firm and an intern for the local Community Foundation, her discipline, curiosity, and genuine passion for PR make her a promising public relations professional and a deserving representative of the field's bright future.



EVALUATIONS

Help us keep improving this conference by providing your feedback. We have two surveys: one for the sessions and another for the conference overall. Please complete them at your convenience. Thank you!



FEEDBACK FOR BREAKOUT SESSIONS



FEEDBACK FOR CONFERENCE OVERALL

SPEAKERS

THOMAS BROADUS

Thomas Broadus serves as Chief Marketing Officer for Mississippi State University, where he leads institutional brand strategy, digital transformation, and integrated marketing initiatives for the Office of Public Affairs. With 20 years of communication experience across marketing, brand development, media production, and strategic communications, he has guided large scale campaigns that strengthen national visibility and has been an early adopter across the digital marketing landscape.



At Mississippi State Thomas oversees centralized storytelling across platforms, aligning research driven strategy with authentic campus narratives that resonate with students, alumni, faculty, and national audiences. His leadership focuses on measurable performance growth, cultural relevance, and platform specific optimizations and trends.

In addition to his professional leadership, he is pursuing a doctorate in Strategic Media, researching algorithm driven communication and audience behavior. He is passionate about equipping communications professionals to compete in an algorithm dominated environment through disciplined strategy, creativity, and data informed decision making.

**“SUCCESS USUALLY COMES TO THOSE WHO
ARE TOO BUSY TO BE LOOKING FOR IT.”
~ HENRY DAVID THOREAU.**

SPEAKERS

KARYN BROWN, APR

Karyn Brown is the assistant dean for communication and media for the Mississippi State University College of Arts & Sciences. She is a longtime public relations and broadcast educator in the MSU Department of Communication with 30-plus years of experience and is an MSU John Grisham Master Teacher. She is co-founder of MSU's PRSSA chapter where she currently serves as the Mississippi State professional liaison.



In addition to her role leading communication efforts for the College of Arts & Sciences, Brown serves on the MSU Brand Education Steering Committee educating MSU staff on how to best implement the university's brand identity in public-facing communication.

And, nationally, she leads the Council for Colleges for Arts & Sciences Communication Community. This is a group that assists communicators of liberal arts programs across the country. Locally, she volunteers her time serving on Starkville Academy's Public Relations and Marketing Committee.

In her first professional jobs, she was a reporter and producer for KWQC-TV in Davenport, Iowa, served as the executive director and spokesperson for MADD-North Carolina, and worked at the public relations firm Mediacall Services in Macomb, Illinois. Brown worked as a reporter, producer and anchor for WCBI-TV in Columbus and is currently hosting several segments of WCBI-TV's "On the Beat".

She has been a member of the Public Relations of Mississippi since 1993 and is a member of PRSA since 2014.

**"EVERYTHING YOU CAN
IMAGINE IS REAL."
~ PABLO PICASSO**

SPEAKERS

DAN FARKAS

Professional Wearer of Many Hats isn't something you can put on a LinkedIn profile, but it may be the best way to describe Dan Farkas.

Dan is a Professor of Strategic Communication at Ohio University, where he teaches research, strategy, content creation, and analytics courses. His PRSSA advised chapters have earned Chapter of the Year, Agency of the Year, Star Chapter, and Pacesetter awards.

Dan also travels the country training organizations better share their story in a world of communication.



to
cluttered

Dan's been called "A recognized thought leader in PR....drawing on his collective experience as a former journalist and current practitioner and instructor."

His book, Strategic Content Marketing: Creating Effective Content in Practice, is out now. You can also hear him on The Strategic Communicator Podcast, part of the Marketing Podcast Network.

In a former life, Dan earned more than 20 awards for his work in television news. His work appeared on CNN, MSNBC, and SI.com.

**"TALENT HITS A TARGET NO ONE ELSE
CAN HIT. GENIUS HITS A TARGET NO
ONE ELSE CAN SEE."
~ ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER**

SPEAKERS

LISA FRAZIER, APR

Lisa Frazier, APR is Founder and Principal of Camellia Strategic Communications, where she helps organizations communicate strategically, manage crises, and engage their communities with purpose. An accredited public relations professional, university instructor, and communications strategist, Lisa brings extensive experience in strategic communication, leadership coaching, and ethics. She has served in leadership roles at the local, state, and regional levels of the profession and is committed to advancing ethical public relations practice.



J. SUZANNE HORSLEY, PH.D.

J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D. (UNC-Chapel Hill), is an associate professor in Advertising and Public Relations at The University of Alabama. Her research focuses on crisis and disaster communication in the public and nonprofit sectors. She has published in public relations, public administration, qualitative methods, and communication journals and handbooks. She co-authored the 6th edition of *On Deadline: Managing Media Relations* (Waveland Press, 2021) and *The Media Relations Training Handbook* (Waveland Press, 2023).

Horsley's excellence in teaching and service has been recognized on campus, regionally, and nationally. In 2012, she was named the Public Relations Educator of the Year by the Public Relations Council of Alabama and by the Southern Public Relations Federation. Her work to engage students in the response efforts after the April 2011 tornado outbreak was recognized with the White House Champions of Change award in 2012. Prior to teaching, Horsley was a PR practitioner in Virginia, primarily in state government and university settings. She has volunteered as a national spokesperson with the American Red Cross, deploying to several national-level disasters. She has also trained communicators in emergency management agencies and nonprofits around the country.



SPEAKERS

PAUL KATOOL

Paul Katool joined the Mississippi Department of Transportation Public Affairs Division in 2016 as the agency's first Social Media Strategist. In 2019, he was promoted to Digital Media Manager, where he led the creation of MDOT's nationally award-winning Extra Mile Podcast. In 2022, Paul assumed the role of Deputy Director of Public Affairs, which includes helping to run the day-to-day operations of the division and leading content strategy.



SAM KEALHOFER

Sam Kealhofer is the Coordinator of Communications & Research Support for the College of Arts & Sciences at Mississippi State University. His work spans content creation, social media management, podcast and video production, media relations, and grant development. Sam hosts and produces Vision Podcast and Vision TV, which highlights faculty accomplishments and stories. He also spearheads the College's annual Spring Research Symposium initiatives, highlighting faculty research across campus in interesting ways. He holds a Master of Arts in English literature with an emphasis in creative writing from Mississippi State University and has previously taught composition courses, served as an editor for literary publications, and worked as a high school English teacher. An active member of Mississippi's literary community, Sam serves as a juror and workshop leader for different writing organizations and leads a local book club focused on contemporary fiction.



SPEAKERS

ANGELA LEVINS

I started my career in 2002 as a news producer at my hometown station, WLOX-TV in Biloxi. From Biloxi to Norfolk to Mobile, I've been behind the scenes of some major stories. Awards from 10 years in local news include an Edward R. Murrow and Peabody for Hurricane Katrina coverage and a Virginia Broadcasters Award for breaking news of a Portsmouth Church Fire. The most rewarding moments in my career are when I've been able to step out of box. I've created a half hour special for Habitat for Humanity (2008) and Fugitive Files (2012). From TV to print, I enjoyed the opportunity to cover a variety of human interest stories and dig through the archives of the Mobile Press-Register. Today, I use all I learned in 13 years of newsroom time at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. I share research news, education opportunities, hands-on learning experiences, and more. There's never a boring day at the office.



**“IF THE ONLY TOOL YOU HAVE IS A HAMMER, YOU
TEND TO SEE EVERY PROBLEM AS A NAIL.”
~ ABRAHAM MASLOW**

SPEAKERS

MIKALA MCCURRY, APR

Mikala McCurry, APR, is an award-winning Accredited public relations practitioner with a passion for empowering others with information and building mutually beneficial relationships. She currently serves as the Public Affairs Coordinator for the Alabama Securities Commission, a state agency that oversees the financial securities industry in Alabama. She leads the Commission's She Can initiative, a financial empowerment program for women in Alabama. Mikala also serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Hall School of Communication and Journalism at Troy University and a Public Relations Consultant for several small businesses in Alabama. In her professional career, Mikala has worked in the media, insurance, accounting, nonprofit, state and federal government sectors to gain a well-rounded view of public relations and communications in many industries.



Mikala earned her bachelor's degree in communication studies with a minor in public relations and master's degree in strategic communication from Troy University. She has also earned her Accreditation in Public Relations credential, placing her in the top 6% of professionals in her field.

A dedicated steward to her profession, Mikala has received several recognitions throughout her career, including 2022 Outstanding Employee of the Year, the Southern Public Relations Federation 2023 Young Practitioner of the Year, and Central Alabama's inaugural 40 Under 40 in 2023. Her work has been highlighted through statewide and regional competitions, including a Judge's Choice award at the state level and a Best of Show award at the regional level.

Mikala is heavily involved in her professional community, serving as the 2026 President of the Public Relations Council of Alabama; the VP of Accreditation and Ethics for the PRCA Montgomery Chapter; a representative on the Southern Public Relations Federation Board of Directors; President of the Troy University Hall School of Journalism and Communication Alumni Chapter; a graduate of Leadership Montgomery's Torchbearers Class XII, and a member of the Public Relations Society of America. In the community, she has served on Junior Boards for the Family Sunshine Center and the Child Protect Children's Advocacy Center and is a member of the Brewtech Magnet High School Business and Finance Advisory Committee. She also supports the PR and communications role for her church, Unity Worship Center, and pours into others through her platform, "Walk by Faith – I'm Walking, too" – a community dedicated to helping others build their relationship with Christ.

SPEAKERS

ROBIN MCKINNEY, APR

Robin McKinney, APR, is the Digital Marketing Strategist for North Mississippi Health Services, where she has led a comprehensive website redesign and implemented new digital strategies for the region's largest health care provider. She also brings more than a decade of nonprofit marketing and communications experience to her work.

An active leader in the profession, Robin serves on the boards of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi, her local PRAM chapter, the Early Childhood Coalition of Tupelo/Lee County, and the Gumtree Museum of Art. She was named Person of the Year in the Daily Journal's 2020 Top 40 Under 40 class and has spoken at state and national conferences on digital strategy. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Mississippi and a master's degree in nonprofit management from Northeastern University.

She lives in Tupelo, Mississippi, with her husband, Brad; their son, Jacob, a senior at Mississippi State; and their cats, Darwin and Claude.



LORI MILLER, APR

In her career, Lori Miller has been a corporate spokesperson, media relations trainer, radio talk show host, research director, and news director for two Army TV stations in Germany. She's earned many awards for her work including two Best of Show awards and the Department of the Army's Civilian Broadcast Journalist of the Year.

For nearly 40 years, she's been a member of Public Relations Council of Alabama and currently serves as PRCA's Association Manager for the state.



SPEAKERS

REBECCA TODD MINDER

Rebecca Todd Minder has more than 35 years of experience in marketing and publicity. She is the Director of Alabama Heritage magazine and cohost of the weekly podcast “Coffee & History: A Conversation with Alabama Heritage,” which also airs on Alabama Public Radio. A dedicated community leader, Rebecca serves on the executive board of the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History Foundation and the Alabama Historical Association. Rebecca’s extensive civic involvement includes roles with the Arts & Humanities Council of Tuscaloosa and the DCH Regional Medical Center Patient & Family Advocacy Council. A graduate of Leadership Tuscaloosa, she holds an MA in American Studies and a BA in Public Relations, both from The University of Alabama.



SARAH NICHOLAS

Sarah Nicholas is the communication specialist for Mississippi State University’s College of Arts and Sciences, where she is now in her ninth year. A proud MSU graduate with a bachelor’s degree in communication with a concentration in public relations, Sarah spent four years as a PR specialist for the Institutions of Higher Learning in Jackson before transitioning to remote work during her children’s early years. For a decade, she served as an editor for EditMyEnglish.com, helping international students refine academic writing for English-speaking institutions.



At MSU, Sarah writes news releases and feature stories highlighting the accomplishments of faculty, staff, and students, manages the college’s annual Vision magazine, and collaborates closely with the Office of Public Affairs to promote the people and programs of Arts and Sciences. She and her husband have been married 25 years and have two children—one a senior at Mississippi State and one a freshman at Mississippi College.

SPEAKERS

STEPHANIE PETTIS, APR, CPRC

Stephanie Pettis, APR, CPRC, is the Associate Director of Communications for Strategic Initiatives and Analytics at The University of Alabama. In this role, she leads measurement, reporting, and data-informed strategies to assess the effectiveness of institutional communications. With more than twenty years of experience across higher education, agency, and corporate communications, she has developed expertise in analytics-driven storytelling, executive communications, integrated campaigns and organizational reporting.



At The University of Alabama, Pettis guides key performance indicator (KPI) reporting and co-leads the development of award-winning publications, such as the University's Year in Review and the Division of Strategic Communications' annual report. Prior to this role, she was Vice President at 25th Hour Communications, advising colleges nationwide on enrollment growth, executive positioning, crisis communications and social media strategy.

As an accredited public relations professional, Pettis brings extensive experience in strategic communications leadership, analytics, and integrated planning within higher education and agency settings. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in strategic communication at The University of Alabama.

“I’VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.”
~ MAYA ANGELOU



SPEAKERS

SUSAN POOLE, APR

Born and raised in Vernon, Ala, Susan is the Corporate Marketing and Public Relations Director for The Westervelt Company, based in Tuscaloosa, Ala. She has an M.S. in Marketing Management from the University of Maryland, and an M.S. in Human Environmental Science from the University of Alabama. Susan is accredited in Public Relations.



As the Corporate Marketing and Public Relations Director, she is responsible for public and community relations, internal communications and overseeing corporate marketing efforts. She is the President of the Westervelt Foundation, which implements the Company's charitable giving strategy. She is a certified Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, having focused on projects that improve communication within organizations and that demonstrate project and program effectiveness.

Susan has almost 30 years of experience in marketing, communications and public relations. Prior to joining Westervelt in 2017, she was the global manufacturing communications manager for International Paper. Her experience also includes roles as a public affairs director, marketing manager and positions with embassies in Croatia and Chile with the U.S. Department of State.

During her career, Susan has been involved in many organizations, including the United Way, Leadership Tuscaloosa and Leadership Autauga County, the Prattville-Autauga Character Coalition, YMCA, Rotary, and United Way of West Alabama and the Family Support Center of Prattville. She is a former Board member for the Southern Public Relations Federation and the Public Relations Council of Alabama.

Susan is married to Jeff, who she followed around the world during his U.S. Marine Corps career, and they have three children and two grandchildren.



SPEAKERS

SARAH TRIPLETT

A 2024 graduate of Mississippi State University with a degree in Integrated Digital Marketing, Sarah Triplett currently serves as the Social Media Strategist for Mississippi State within the Office of Public Affairs. In this role, she helps support the university's marketing efforts by overseeing MSU's social media presence and shaping a cohesive, campus-wide digital strategy that advances brand awareness, recruitment objectives, and institutional storytelling. She works closely with the Chief Marketing Officer and senior leadership to align platform-specific execution with broader institutional priorities. Her work emphasizes thoughtful storytelling, cultural relevance, and performance-driven growth across evolving digital channels.



Before joining Mississippi State full-time, Sarah built her experience in the tourism and destination marketing industry and with multiple marketing agencies, where she led reporting for advertising and social media campaigns, conducted competitor analysis, and developed data-informed digital strategies. Her passion for analytics and performance measurement continues to inform her approach, ensuring that marketing initiatives are guided by audience insights, strategic evaluation, and measurable outcomes.

In addition to her professional role, Sarah serves on the Public Relations Association of Mississippi Board of Directors for the Starkville chapter. She is passionate about mentoring emerging communicators and helping organizations transform content into meaningful connection through strategy, creativity, and data-informed decision-making.

**“NO. TRY NOT. DO. OR DO NOT.
THERE IS NO TRY.”**
~ YODA

SPEAKERS

PAUL WOLF

Paul Wolf is an award-winning destination marketing professional passionate about bringing communities to life through people-centered storytelling. With experience leading initiatives that enhance brand visibility, he specializes in SEO-driven website content, destination public relations, and podcasting. He oversees and manages content strategy and creation, and hosts travel journalists to highlight local culture and experiences.

As the founder of a successful destination marketing brand, he brings expertise in publishing, content creation, and integrated marketing. Recognized with honors such as the US Travel Association ESTO Destiny People's Choice Award for websites, he is dedicated to crafting narratives that connect, inspire, and drive engagement.



STAFFORD WOOD, APR

Her friendly face and casual demeanor about all things business are merely a decoy - there is no one else you want on your side for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity or defending you in a crisis. Stafford Wood is a deadly combination of strategic brains, mystical intuition, humor and corporate marketing intelligence. As the Founder and President of Covalent Logic for twenty years, Stafford leads a team of thirty corporate communications experts in internal communications, graphic design, web development and public relations. Stafford is an Emergenetics Associate leading professional development, team building and organizational transitions through mergers and acquisitions all over the country. As an Accredited Senior Practitioner of Public Relations, she's received two lifetime achievement awards from the American Advertising Federation and the Public Relations Association of Louisiana and has been inducted into the Southern Public Relations Federation Hall of Fame. Stafford holds a Master of Arts from St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she is currently pursuing a second Masters in Eastern Classics and learning Sanskrit.



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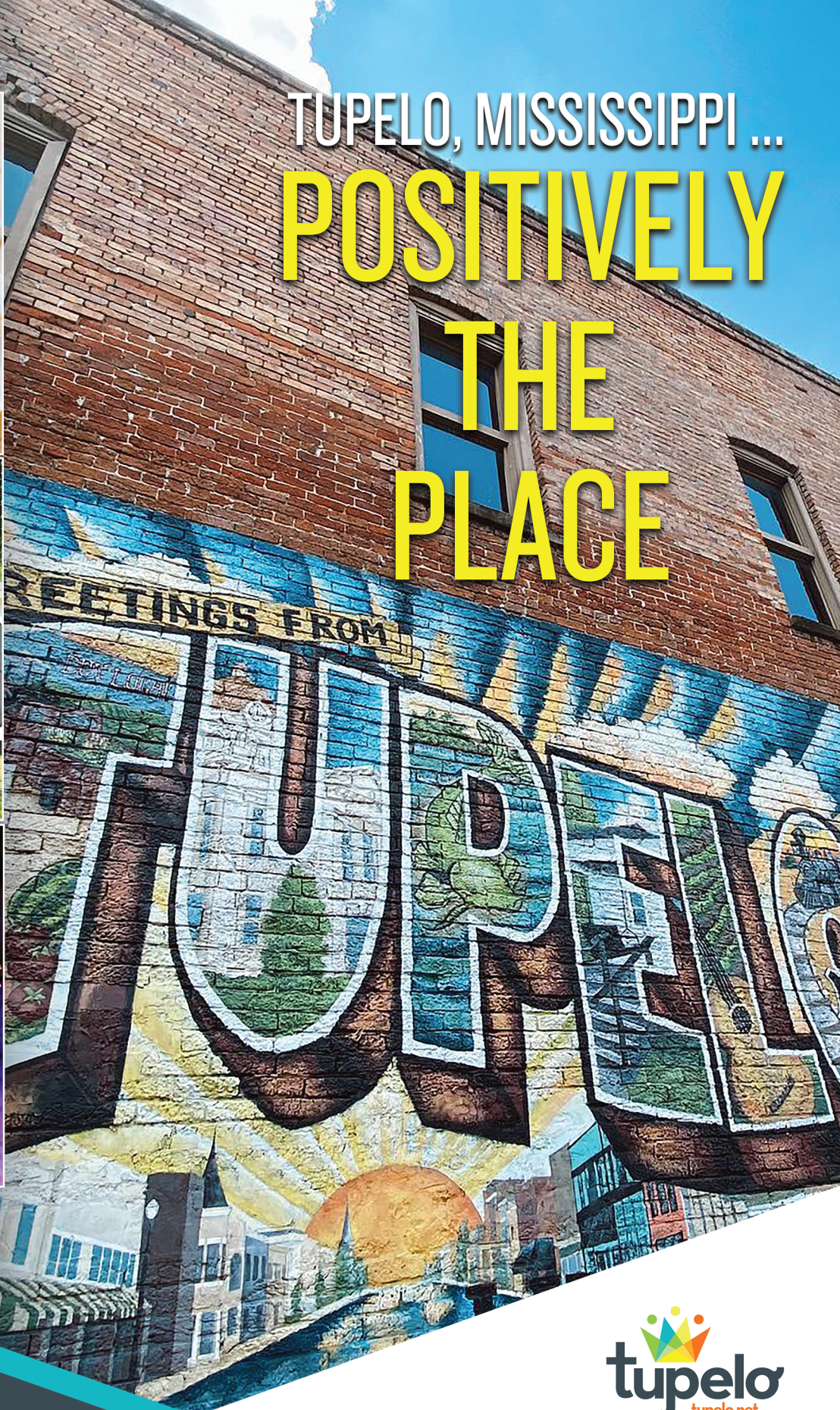
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~ EDWARD BERNAYS

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