

ACADEMY CONNECTION



April 2026



Dear Fellows and Members,

As the season shifts and spring begins to unfold, we are reminded of the renewed energy and inspiration this time of year brings to our kitchens and our craft. This season represents not only renewal in nature, but also within our culinary community, a time to reconnect, innovate, and continue striving for excellence.

The AAC Hall of Fame Committee has selected the 2026 Hall of Fame recipients (listed below). As in previous years, the selection process included many highly qualified candidates, all with impressive accomplishments. The committee cast anonymous votes to elect three AAC Hall of Fame Fellows, one Honorary Fellow, and two Fellows posthumously.

Also listed below are this year's American Academy of Chefs award recipients. I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to each of the Hall of Fame inductees and award honorees. All will be recognized at the Annual Induction Meeting and Dinner held during the ACF National Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I recently had the honor of attending the American Academy of Chefs Dinner on March 29 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, held in conjunction with the ACF Southeast Symposium. Thank you to Chef Keith E. Gardner, CEC, CCE, CCA, AAC, ACF Southeast Vice President for your incredible hospitality during symposium weekend. It was truly a pleasure to spend time with him and colleagues who share such a deep passion for the culinary arts. The event was exceptionally well organized and highly successful. The support of ACF Triad Chapter, NC, Inc. Board of Directors and Chef Jeff Bacon, CEC, CCA, AAC, the team at Second Harvest Food Bank helped create an impressive experience that underscored the value of ACF membership for both emerging culinarians and seasoned professionals. The seminars and keynote presentations were informative, engaging, and thought-provoking. Thank you sincerely for your incredible hospitality. It was truly a pleasure to spend time with all colleagues who share such a deep passion for the culinary arts.

Our AAC Southeast Region Director, Chef Alan L. Romano, CEC, CCE, AAC, did an outstanding job coordinating the dinner. The evening was a tremendous success, and I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Chef Lance S. Cook, CEC, CCA and his entire team for delivering an exceptional culinary experience.

The elegance and attention to detail in both planning and execution were evident throughout the evening. The event truly reflected the professionalism, culinary excellence, and high standards that define the AAC. Each course was thoughtfully prepared and expertly paired, while the dining room décor and ice sculptures, crafted by Chef Romano, were truly remarkable. The service provided by the staff at Forsyth Country Club was impeccable.



I look forward to the honor of swearing in Chef Cook as a new Fellow and presenting the Chair's Medal to Chef Romano at our Annual Academy of Chefs Dinner in Grand Rapids.

Congratulations to both on these well-deserved recognitions.

As we look ahead to this special event, I encourage those interested in attending the AAC Dinner to reserve tickets as soon as possible. Seating is limited, and we are currently at 50% capacity.

Additionally, the Scholarships Committee has completed its review and awarded grants to selected applicants. This year, three chefs have received support to compete at the Worldchefs Competition in Wales this May. We wish them continued success as they represent our profession on the global stage.

As we move forward together, may we draw inspiration from the abundance of the season and remain committed to growth, mentorship, and the pursuit of excellence.

Respectfully,



Joe G. Aiello, CEC, AAC, HOF

Chair, American Academy of Chefs

Tickets are Now on Sale!

Tickets for the Annual American Academy of Chef Induction Dinner and Reception and the Spouses Luncheon are now on sale!

**Tickets are available to AAC Fellows Only.
Seating is limited. There will be no on-site ticket sales.**

American Academy of Chefs Induction Dinner

Location: Amway Grand Plaza

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

6:00pm – 10:00pm

\$300.00 per ticket

Formal attire is requested.

American Academy of Chefs Spouses Luncheon

Location: Grand Rapids Convention Center

Wednesday, July 1, 2026

12:00pm – 2:00pm
\$70.00 per ticket

PURCHASE TICKETS

2026 American Academy of Chefs Candidates

We are Proud to Present our 2026 Tentative American Academy of Chefs

Candidates for Inductions:

R. Andrew Chlebana, CMPC, CCA

ACF Chicago Chefs

Lance S. Cook, CEC, CCA

ACF Triad Chapter, NC, Inc.

Aaron R. Guerra, CEC

National Member

Jason D. Hall, CMC

ACF Raleigh-Durham Area Chef's Assn.

Marvin Herrera, CEC

ACF Augusta Chapter

Derek J. Ivancic, CEC, CCA

ACF Cleveland Chapter Inc

Todd Leonard, CEC

ACF Beehive Chefs Chapter Inc

Gary A. Marquardt, CEC

ACF Greater Grand Rapids Chefs Association

Joshua L. Martin, CEC, CCE

ACF Chefs de Cuisine of the Inland Northwest

Brian T. Mattice, CEC, CCA, CCE

ACF Professional Chefs / Cooks Assn of Rochester

Amanda N. Miller, CEPC

ACF West Michigan Lakeshore Chapter

Kevin L. Penn, CEC, CCA

ACF Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association

Andrew Sayes, CMC

ACF Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association

Julie Selonke, CEC

ACF Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association

Samantha Slechta, CEC

ACF Sarasota Bay Chefs Association

Dean C. Sprague, CEC

Texas Chefs Association

Timothy S. Wright, CEC

ACF Cleveland Chapter Inc

Walter S. Zuromski, CEC, CCE

ACF Sarasota Bay Chefs Association

2026 Honorary American Academy of Chefs- Tentative Inductees

Nazim Khan, CEC

ACF Tampa Bay Culinary Association, Inc.

Omar Martinez

ACF Chicago Chefs

William D. Paul

ACF Tampa Bay Culinary Association, Inc.

Tracy B. Tobin

ACF Chicago Chefs

Carmelo Vadicchino

National Member

2026 American Academy of Chefs Hall of Fame

**We are Proud to Present our 2026 American Academy of Chefs Hall of Fame
Candidates for Induction:**

Jan Bandula, CMPC, CCE, AAC

ACF Greater Baltimore Chapter Inc.

Patrick D. Mitchell, CEC, AAC

Texas Chefs Association

Vincent J. Alberici, CEC, AAC

ACF Philadelphia Delaware Valley Chefs Association

Honorary Hall of Fame

O. Sigfried Krauss, CEC, AAC

ACF Pikes Peak Chapter, Inc.

Posthumous Hall of Fame

J. Daniel Knerr, CEC, AAC

ACF Rhode Island Chapter

Robert A. Milam, CEC, AAC

ACF West Virginia Chapter

2026 American Academy of Chefs Award Recipients

AAC Chair's Medal

Alan L. Romano, CEC, CCE, AAC

Lawrence A. Conti, CEC, AAC, HOF, Chair's Achievement Award

George A. O'Palenick, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF

Joseph Amendola Award

Lisa M. Ransey, CEC, CEPC, AAC

Lt. General John D. McLaughlin Award

CW5 Shane Rich

Chef Good Taste Award

Christopher Desens, CEC, CCA, AAC

Sharing Culinary Traditions Award

Keith A. Coughenour, CEC, AAC

Celebrity Chef
Gwendolyn Rogers

Legends Award
Ferdinand E. Metz, CMC, AAC, HOF, HBOT
Fritz H. Sonnenschmidt, CMC, AAC, HOF



2027 American Academy of Chefs Applications

Membership - Connection - Involvement

The "Prestigious Honor Society" of the American Culinary Federation offers a unique way to honor those who have worked hard and risen through the ranks of the culinary field. A successful application for acceptance as an AAC Fellow will serve as the culmination of years of involvement in the great culinary profession, and as an ACF member.

An Academy Fellow must request an application for a potential inductee. Candidates will need two sponsor letters of recommendation from voting Academy Fellows. An Academy Fellow is permitted to sponsor one new applicant per year, as is a Regional Director.

Applications must be returned by December 1st, 2026. Induction will be at the 2027 ACF National Convention.

Applications for American Academy of Chefs Induction for 2027 are now available. You can review the current requirements on how to become an American Academy of Chefs Fellow on the ACF Website.

[VIEW REQUIREMENTS](#)



2027 Hall of Fame

“The Culinary Hall of Fame was unanimously accepted by the Academy members. Its concept is to honor those men and women who, because of their outstanding attributes, have won the respect and love of their professional guild. Therefore, they are so honored by their peers as a positive reflection to all those in this profession who seek achievement!” — Hermann G. Rusch

Applications for American Academy of Chefs Induction for 2027 are now available.

Applications must be returned by December 1st, 2026. Induction will be at the 2027 ACF National Convention.

REQUEST APPLICATION

Tax-Deductible Donations

(March 1 - March 31, 2026)

David Leo Banks, CEC, AAC

Jesse R. Bartyzal, CEC, AAC

Kevin J. Blackston

Kenneth J. Bucholtz, CEC, AAC

Gloria M. Cabral, CWPC, CCE, AAC

Jack L. Schmid, AAC

Harold S. Small, HAAC

Donations, as many as you choose to make in any given year, are welcome at any time. On behalf of the entire Academy family, we thank you again for your generous support. Donations may be made by check mailed directly to the Academy Office, online, or via credit card. Please contact the Academy Administrator at academy@acfcchefs.org if you have any questions.

THANK YOU to all of our 2026 Donors!

DONATE NOW

We Would Love to Hear from You!

We would like to hear what great things our Academy Fellows are doing. Email Karen Stamper at kstamper@acfchefs.org with events, pictures, and acknowledgements about AAC Fellows and we will post in the monthly Academy Connection.

2025 AAC Sponsors

We would like to thank our sponsors for their continued support of the American Academy of Chefs and their mission.

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Through the Academy Connection e-newsletter, the American Academy of Chefs provides members with news and information on products and services offered by the AAC®, its partners and American Culinary Federation.

American Culinary Federation

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