

ACADEMY CONNECTION



May 2026



Dear Fellows and Members,

Over the past several months, the AAC Board, with the continued support of the ACF National Staff, have been actively engaged in several important initiatives, including formalizing the AAC/ACF Scholarship Committee (Reimund D. Pitz, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF, AAC Vice Chair, Committee Chair, Barry R. Young, MBA, CEC, CCE, AAC, ACFEF Chair, Paul G. Brennen, CEC, CCA, AAC, Mark A. Cochran, CEC, CCA, AAC, Vanessa Jaurique-Marquis, CEC, AAC, Estevan J. Jimenez, Victor Sommo, CEC, Kivi Hermans, Program Manager of Continuing Education, Staff Liaison, Karen Stamper, Executive Liaison, Staff Liaison) and continuing the development of policies and procedures that will strengthen our organization in the future.

In my role as ACF Board of Directors Member liaison with the finance department, I had the opportunity to participate in the hiring process for our new Director of Finance, Pramod “Bobby” Shivdasani. On behalf of all Fellows, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Bobby as he joins the team. I would also like to congratulate JJ Vitale on her new position as ACF Executive Director. We wish them great success in their new roles.

This spring, I had the privilege of attending two exceptional American Academy of Chefs (AAC) dinners, each showcasing the professionalism, culinary excellence, and camaraderie that define our organization.

The first dinner was held on Sunday, March 29, at Forsyth Country Club in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I would like to sincerely thank Chef Lance S. Cook, CEC, CCA and his entire team for hosting such an outstanding AAC dinner. The meticulous planning, flawless execution, and elegance of the evening were truly impressive. Special recognition goes to Chef Alan L. Romano, CEC, CCE, AAC, AAC Southeast Regional Director, for his outstanding efforts in organizing the event and creating the remarkable ice sculptures that added such distinction to the occasion.

I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to the weekend's events, especially ACF Southeast Vice President Chef Keith E. Gardner, CEC, CCE, CCA, AAC for organizing a highly successful ACF Southeast Symposium.



Another memorable AAC dinner this spring took place in Baltimore in celebration of Chef Jan Bandula, CMPC, CCE, AAC and his well-deserved American Academy of Chefs Lifetime Achievement Award. It was truly an honor to be part of such a meaningful evening, surrounded by so many talented professionals and dedicated culinarians.

My sincere thanks go to Chef Lisa D. Tomecek, CEPC, AAC and her committee for organizing a first-class event, as well as to Chef Kevin W. Keller, CEC, Chef Michael Santos, CEPC, CEC, Chef Melissa Hawkins, CWPC, CCE, and the entire team at Baltimore Country Club, Five Farms in Timonium, Maryland, for their exceptional hospitality and professionalism throughout the evening.

Chef Bandula's career stands as a shining example of excellence, leadership, mentorship, and service to the culinary profession. His lasting impact on the culinary community, as well as on the many chefs and students he has mentored throughout his distinguished career, speaks volumes about the kind of chef, mentor, and individual he is.

It is especially meaningful to look ahead to later this year, when Chef Bandula will be inducted into the American Academy of Chefs Hall of Fame, a truly fitting honor recognizing a remarkable and influential career.



Congratulations to everyone involved in creating two memorable and beautifully executed AAC events.

Once again, this year, the AAC, in alignment with its mission to support and encourage young culinarians, proudly sponsored the NASA HUNCH Culinary Competition. This outstanding program provides secondary school students with the opportunity to showcase their culinary talents through a national competition.

Our Vice Chair, Chef Reimond D. Pitz, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF, represented the AAC as a judge during the competition finals. This year's theme, "Tacos," inspired an impressive level of creativity, resulting in exceptional recipes, videos, and written presentations from participating teams. We congratulate all of the students and schools that participated in this year's competition.

The winning teams will receive scholarship opportunities from the AAC/ACF and other sponsors, while the first-place team will have its recipe processed for a future spaceflight mission.

Congratulations to the following teams:

- **1st Place** – Warren Tech, Lakewood, CO
 - Spicy Carne Asada Street Corn Tacos
- **2nd Place** – Gladys Porter Early College High School, Brownsville, TX
 - Chile Lime Tilapia Tacos
- **3rd Place** – Old Colony RVTHS, Rochester, MA
 - Chicken Vindaloo Tacos





We are currently finalizing plans for the annual AAC Induction Meeting and Gala Dinner at the Amway Grand Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I look forward to inducting the 2026 Fellows Class and presenting AAC awards to several deserving recipients.

I am pleased to share that the dinner is officially sold out. Thank you all for your tremendous support. The hotel's culinary team is finalizing the menu and looks forward to showcasing their talents during what promises to be an exceptional evening.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the ACF Convention and the AAC Meeting and Dinner.

Respectfully,

Joe G. Aiello, CEC, AAC, HOF
Chair, American Academy of Chefs

AAC Events at the ACF National Convention

Tickets for the Annual Spouses Luncheon are now on sale! AAC chefs who missed the chance to grab tickets for the sold out American Academy of Chefs Induction Reception and Dinner can join the waiting list.

American Academy of Chefs Spouses Luncheon

Location: Grand Rapids Convention Center

Wednesday, July 1, 2026

12:00pm – 2:00pm

\$70.00 per ticket

American Academy of Chefs Induction Dinner- SOLD OUT

Please reach out to [Karen Stamper](#) if you would like to be added to the waiting list.

Location: Amway Grand Plaza

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

6:00pm – 10:00pm

\$300.00 per ticket

Formal attire is requested.

Tickets are available to AAC Fellows Only.

Seating is limited. There will be no on-site ticket sales.

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 Vadacchino

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

(April 1 - April 30, 2026)

Charles C. Chang, CEC, AAC

Scott T. Erwin, CEC, AAC

Paul J. O'Toole, CEC, AAC

George M. Sideras, CEC, AAC

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@acfchefs.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.

2026 AAC Sponsors

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



YOUR SOURCE FOR FINE DINING
ALLEN BROTHERS
THE GREAT STEAKHOUSE STEAKS®



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

6816 Southpoint Pkwy Ste 400

Jacksonville, FL 32216

(904) 824-4468

