

ACADEMY CONNECTION



August 2026



Dear Fellows of the Academy,

The American Academy of Chefs' 54th Annual Induction Dinner, held on June 30, 2026, at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was a highlight of the 2026 ACF National Convention. The evening celebrated excellence, leadership, and service while welcoming 30 accomplished culinary leaders as the newest Fellows and recognizing award recipients of the American Academy of Chefs.

Each new Fellow represents the professionalism, leadership, and dedication that define the Academy. I would also like to recognize the executive chef and brigade of the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel for delivering a memorable menu through exceptional preparation and presentation. The service team provided attentive and gracious hospitality throughout the evening, and I have received many positive comments regarding the quality and success of the event.

As Chairman of the Academy, it was a privilege to welcome our newest Fellows and share the responsibility and honor that comes with joining this distinguished organization. The AAC represents more than recognition; it reflects a commitment to mentorship, education, service, and creating opportunities for future generations of culinarians.

A highlight of the evening was presenting the prestigious AAC Legend Award to Chef Ferdinand E. Metz, CMC, AAC, HOF, HBOT recognizing more than five decades of leadership, innovation, and service to the culinary profession. Chef Metz's contributions, including his service as past president of the ACF, his instrumental role in guiding the ACF Olympic Team to major international competition victories, and his tenure as president of The Culinary Institute of America, have made a lasting impact on culinary education and our industry. His career remains an inspiration to us all.

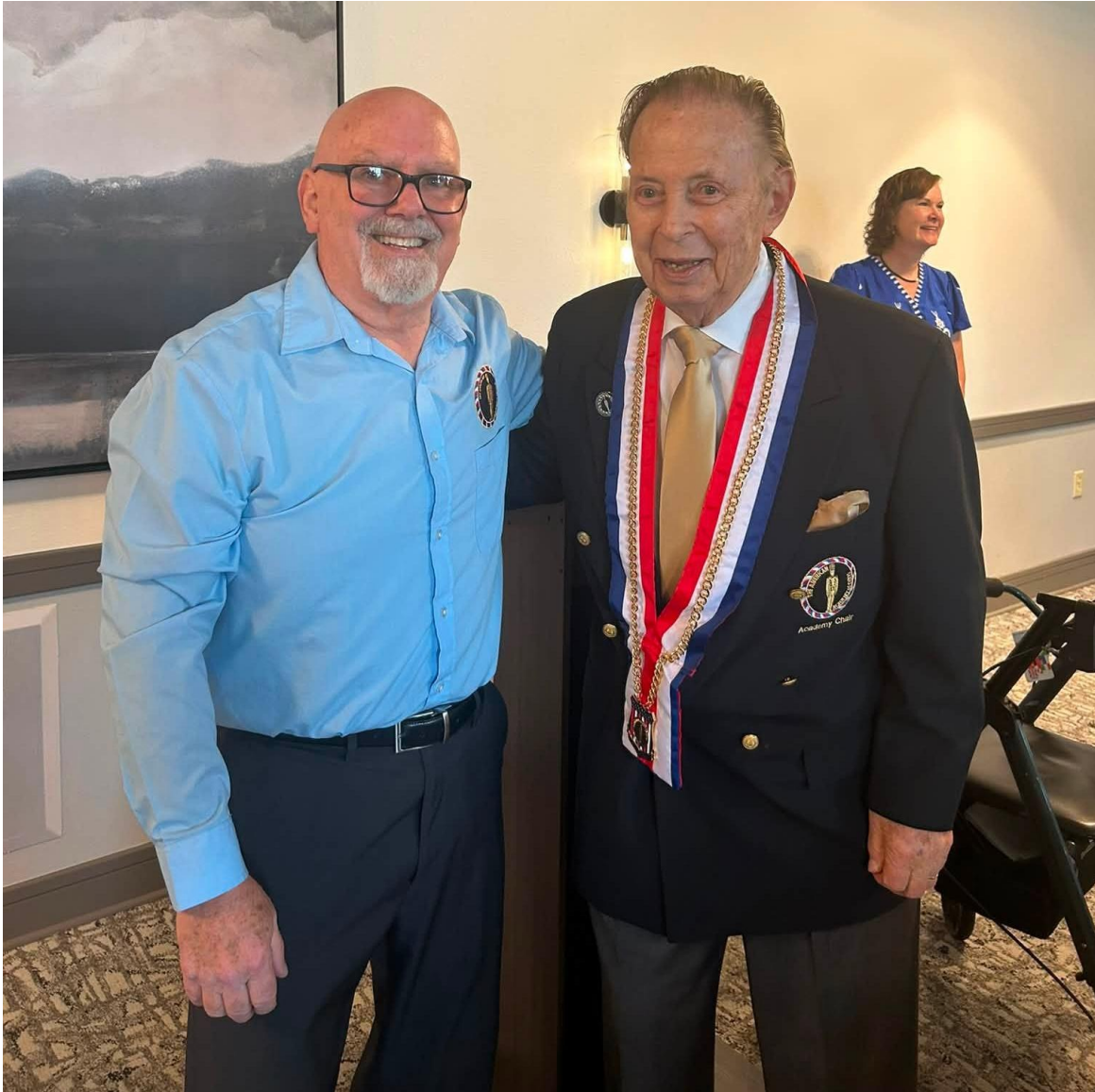
The 2026 ACF National Convention brought together our culinary community for education, professional development, collaboration, and the opportunity to reconnect with friends,

colleagues, educators, students, and industry leaders from across the nation. Events like this reinforce that the American Culinary Federation is more than a professional organization it is a community built on shared knowledge, mentorship, friendship, and a passion for our craft.

I extend my sincere appreciation to ACF President René J. Marquis, CEC, CCE, CCA, AAC, the ACF and AAC Board of Directors, the national office team, sponsors, vendors, partners, and the Fellows of the Academy. Your continued support and commitment enable the AAC to fulfill its mission of recognizing excellence and investing in the future of our profession.

I would also like to recognize Chef George A. O'Palenick, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF and the Board of Directors of the ACF Providence Chapter for their generosity and commitment to the Academy. Their \$10,000 contribution, generated through the AAC dinner hosted by their chapter last year, demonstrates the meaningful impact our chapters can have when we work together to support the future of culinary excellence.

Congratulations to Chef O. Siegfried "Sigi" Krauss, CEC, AAC, HHOF, on your well-deserved induction into the American Academy of Chefs Hall of Fame. A special thank you to Chef Jay Marshall, CEC, AAC, ACF Vice President of the Western Region for doing an outstanding job facilitating the presentation and helping make the ceremony such a memorable occasion. Chef Sigi, your lifelong commitment to mentoring, excellence, and the advancement of our culinary profession has inspired generations of chefs. Congratulations on this extraordinary and well-deserved honor!



Looking ahead, I look forward to meeting with the AAC Board of Directors this fall to continue strengthening our organization through the review and finalization of policies and procedures, budget priorities, and scholarship initiatives. These efforts will help us build upon the strong foundation established by those who came before us.

As I begin my final term as Chairman of the American Academy of Chefs, I remain grateful for the trust placed in me and the opportunity to serve alongside such dedicated culinary professionals. Together, we will continue to uphold the traditions of excellence, leadership, and service that make the AAC a valued part of the American Culinary Federation.

With sincere appreciation,



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

Congratulations to the 2026 AAC Inductees!

We are Proud to Present our 2026 American Academy of Chefs Inductees:



R. Andrew Chlebana, CMPC, CCA, AAC
ACF Chicago Chefs

Lance S. Cook, CEC, CCA, AAC
ACF Triad Chapter, NC, Inc.

Aaron R. Guerra, CEC, AAC
National Member

Jason D. Hall, CMC, AAC
ACF Raleigh-Durham Area Chef's Assn.

Marvin Herrera, CEC, AAC
ACF Augusta Chapter

Derek J. Ivancic, CEC, CCA, AAC
ACF Cleveland Chapter Inc

Todd Leonard, CEC, AAC
ACF Beehive Chefs Chapter Inc

Gary A. Marquardt, CEC, AAC

ACF Greater Grand Rapids Chefs Association

Joshua L. Martin, CEC, CCE, AAC

ACF Chefs de Cuisine of the Inland Northwest

Brian T. Mattice, CEC, CCA, CCE, AAC

ACF Professional Chefs / Cooks Assn of Rochester

Amanda N. Miller, CEPC, AAC

ACF West Michigan Lakeshore Chapter

Kevin L. Penn, CEC, CCA, AAC

ACF Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association

Julie Selonke, CEC, AAC

ACF Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association

Samantha Slechta, CEC, AAC

ACF Sarasota Bay Chefs Association

Dean C. Sprague, CEC, AAC

Texas Chefs Association

Timothy S. Wright, CEC, AAC

ACF Cleveland Chapter Inc

Walter S. Zuromski, CEC, CCE, AAC

ACF Sarasota Bay Chefs Association



**We are Proud to Present our 2026 Honorary American Academy of Chefs
Inductees:**



Nazim Khan, CEC, HAAC
ACF Tampa Bay Culinary Association, Inc.

Omar Martinez, HAAC
ACF Chicago Chefs

William D. Paul, HAAC
ACF Tampa Bay Culinary Association, Inc.

Tracy B. Tobin, RDN LDN, HAAC
ACF Chicago Chefs

Carmelo Vadacchino, HAAC
National Member



Congratulations 2026 AAC Hall of Fame Inductees!

We are Proud to Present our 2026 American Academy of Chefs Hall of Fame Inductees:

Jan Bandula, CMPC, CCE, AAC, HOF
ACF Greater Baltimore Chapter Inc.

Patrick D. Mitchell, CEC, AAC, HOF
Texas Chefs Association

Vincent J. Alberici, CEC, AAC, HOF
ACF Philadelphia Delaware Valley Chefs Association

Honorary Hall of Fame

O. Sigfried Krauss, CEC, AAC, HHOF

ACF Pikes Peak Chapter, Inc.

Posthumous Hall of Fame

J. Daniel Knerr, CEC, AAC, HHOF

ACF Rhode Island Chapter

Robert A. Milam, CEC, AAC, HHOF

ACF West Virginia Chapter





Congratulations to the 2026 AAC 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, HHOF

Legends Award

Ferdinand E. Metz, CMC, AAC, HOF, HBOT

Fritz H. Sonnenschmidt, CMC, AAC, HOF



**Congratulations to all the AAC Fellows Recognized at
the ACF National Convention!**

Lifetime Achievement Winners

Michael J. Beriau, CEC, AAC

James F. Connolly, CEC, CCA, AAC

Ernst W. Gruch, CMC, AAC

Wiley Newbold, CEC, AAC

Louis Perrotte, CEC, AAC, HOF

Hermann G. Rusch Chefs' Achievement Award

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

Central Region Winner: Kevin M. Enright, CEC, CCE, AAC

Northeast Region Winner: George A. O'Palenick, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF

Dr. L.J. Minor Chef Professionalism Award

National Winner Kurt A. Kwiatkowski, CEC, CCA, AAC

Central Region: Kurt A. Kwiatkowski, CEC, CCA, AAC

Southeast Region Winner: Noralyn A. Galdiano, CEC, AAC

Western Region Winner: Jerald “LJ” Klinkenberg, CEC, CCA, AAC

Chef & Child Award

Vanessa Marquis, CEC, AAC

Cutting Edge Award Winners

Bryant Alden, CEC, AAC

David Bressler, CEC, AAC

Travis R. Johnson, CEC, AAC

John Kukucka, CEC, AAC

Harry Linzmayer, CEC, HAAC

Gabe Rosado, CEC, CCA, AAC

Presidential Medallions

Frank Costantino, CEC, CCA, CCE, CEPC, AAC

David J. Durante, CEC, CCA, AAC

Timothy L. England, AAC

Jason E. Knapp, CEC, CCA, AAC

Ryan Marquis, HAAC

Bruce M. Ozga, CEC, CCE, AAC

Shayne M. Taylor, CEC, CCA, AAC

Carmelo Vadalchino, HAAC

Melissa B. Trimmer, CEPC, AAC

2026 Emeritus Judges

Raimund W. Hofmeister, CMC, AAC

Rene J. Marquis, CEC, CCE, CCA, AAC

Helmut Franz Josef Holzer, CMC, AAC

Alan J. Neace, Sr., CEC, AAC

Derek Spendlove, CEPC, CCE, AAC

Dr. Frank Costantino, CEC, CCA, CCE, CEPC, AAC

D. Pitz, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF

2027–2029 AAC Officer Elections

Nominations for the 2027–2029 AAC Officer Elections are now open. The deadline to submit all required paperwork to be considered as a candidate is **December 1, 2026**. Go to [Elections](#) for all the information and required forms.

The term of office is a two (2) year term commencing on the Monday following the 2027 ACF National Convention through the close of the 2029 ACF National Convention.

AAC Elections



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

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REQUEST APPLICATION

Tax-Deductible Donations

June 1 - July 19, 2026

Vince J. Alberici, AAC, HOF	Gwendolyn Rogers, HHOF
David E. Brough, CEC, CCE, CCA, AAC	Addiemae Rolle-Farrington, CEC, CWPC, CCE, HAAC
Vincenzo Del Duca, CEC, HAAC	Jeff L. Simms, HAAC
Aaron R. Guerra, CEC, AAC	Fritz H. Sonnenschmidt, CMC, AAC, HOF
Keith H. Mandabach, CEC, AAC, ED.D	Tracie B. Tobin, RDN LDN, HAAC
Ryan Marquis, HAAC	Osmar H. Vasquez, CEC
Elizabeth B. Mikesell, CEC, AAC	Robert J. White, CEC, CCA, AAC
John A. Minniti, CCE, AAC, HOF, HBOT	ACF Columbus Chapter
Linda S. Musch, CCE, AAC, HOF	ACF Epicurean Club of Boston
Christine Amarosa Neugebauer, CEC, AAC	ACF Rhode Island Chapter
Rajeev Patgaonkar, CEC, AAC	Texas Chefs Association
Rene Rawraway, CEC, CCE, 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@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@acfcchefs.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.





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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