2026 Bourbon Hall of Fame inducts new members, award recipient

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The 2026 Kentucky Bourbon Hall Of Fame inducts new members and Lifetime Achievement Award recipient.

The Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame welcomed its 24th class of inductees, celebrating their lasting contributions to Kentucky's Bourbon industry and its worldwide legacy. A record number of more than 300 industry leaders, legends and luminaries gathered in Louisville to honor the newest members of the prestigious Hall of Fame.

Inductees include two pioneering scientists and distillers who helped shape modern Bourbon production, two Brown-Forman leaders who built Kentucky whiskey into a global powerhouse, a transformative industry advocate who helped usher in Bourbon's modern era, a celebrated storyteller who brought Bourbon history to a worldwide audience, and a longtime legislator whose work helped modernize Kentucky's alcohol laws and fuel the industry's growth.

The exclusive annual event was held at The Marriott Louisville East before an audience of industry leaders and Bourbon enthusiasts, with a livestream extending the celebration to thousands of fans around the world. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear provided welcome remarks, and the ceremony was emceed by Susan Reigler, a renowned Bourbon authority, author, critic, judge and educator.

Founded in 2001 by the Kentucky Distillers' Association, the Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have made a transformational impact on Bourbon's stature, growth and awareness.

It is the highest honor given by the state's $10.6 billion signature industry.

"I am proud to join the Kentucky Distillers' Association in helping celebrate these remarkable honorees and their contributions to Kentucky Bourbon and our Commonwealth," Beshear said. "The Bourbon industry is essential to Kentucky as it supports good-paying jobs, our economy and our record-breaking tourism industry. These leaders are helping ensure that success continues for generations to come and we are grateful to them for all they do. Congratulations."

"Kentucky Bourbon's story has never been shaped by distillers alone. It has been built by innovators, entrepreneurs, advocates, storytellers and leaders who each found a way to move this industry forward," said Gigi DaDan, Chair of the Kentucky Distillers' Association Board of Directors and General Manager of Angel's Envy. "This year's inductees embody that spirit.

"Their accomplishments span generations and disciplines, but they share a common thread: a willingness to challenge the standards, invest in the future and help cement Kentucky's place as the home of Bourbon for the world. We are honored to celebrate their achievements and the lasting impact they have made on our industry."

This year's inductees are in alphabetical order:

• Shane Baker, 55, Danville, Ky. and E. Patrick Heist, Ph.D., 53, Danville, Ky. Baker and Heist, co-founders of Ferm Solutions and Wilderness Trail Distillery, are widely recognized for blending science, innovation, and tradition to advance Kentucky Bourbon. Through expertise in engineering, microbiology, fermentation, and distillation, the duo helped modernize production practices while preserving craftsmanship. Their work with hundreds of distilleries worldwide and the success of Wilderness Trail have made them influential leaders shaping Bourbon's future.

• The late W.L. Lyons Brown Sr. and late George Garvin Brown II, Louisville, Ky. The grandsons of Brown-Forman founder George Garvin Brown played transformative roles in building Brown-Forman into the largest Kentucky-based distilling company following Prohibition. Under their leadership, Early Times became the world's top-selling Kentucky Straight Bourbon, while the company expanded globally and strengthened iconic brands like Jack Daniel's. Their leadership, innovation, and industry service left an enduring mark on Kentucky Bourbon and American whiskey.

• Eric Gregory, 59, Midway, Ky. Under Gregory's leadership, Kentucky Bourbon has experienced unprecedented growth, modernization, and global recognition. Since becoming President of the KDA in 2008, Gregory helped transform the industry through landmark legislative reforms, expansion of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail tour, and unifying distillers of all sizes under a shared vision. Today, Kentucky produces 95% of the world's Bourbon, supports 24,000 jobs, generates more than $10.6 billion annually, and welcomes millions of Bourbon Trail visitors — achievements shaped significantly by Gregory's passion, leadership and advocacy.

• Fred Minnick, 47, Louisville, Ky. Since returning from military service in Iraq, Minnick has become one of Bourbon's most influential modern storytellers and advocates. Through bestselling books, national media coverage, podcasts, live events, and philanthropy, Minnick helped elevate Bourbon into mainstream culture while preserving its history and craftsmanship. A respected author, journalist, and educator, he has shaped how consumers worldwide understand and appreciate Kentucky Bourbon and American whiskey.

• John W. Schickel, 72, Union, Ky. Schickel dedicated 50 years to public service, including a distinguished tenure as Kentucky State Senator and longtime chairman of the Senate Licensing and Occupations Committee. Through landmark alcohol law reforms, Schickel helped modernize Kentucky's regulatory landscape, strengthen the Kentucky Bourbon Trail experience, support craft distilling, and expand tourism opportunities statewide. His leadership played a vital role in Bourbon's growth as a major economic and cultural driver for Kentucky.

Inductees are selected each year by a blue-ribbon committee consisting of past recipients of the Parker Beam Lifetime Achievement Award, the Chair of the KDA Board of Directors, the Governor of the Order of the Writ — Spirit of Kentucky Bourbon Society, and an appointee by the KDA President.

Parker Beam recipients serving on the 2026 selection committee were Bill Samuels Jr., Chairman Emeritus of Maker's Mark; Max Shapira, Executive Chairman of Heaven Hill Brands; Ken Lewis, founder of New Riff Distilling; and Chris Morris, Master Distiller Emeritus at Brown-Forman Corp. and Treasurer of the KDA Board. Not present was Jimmy Russell, Master Distiller at Wild Turkey.

Other members of the 2026 selection committee were Gigi DaDan, General Manager of Angel's Envy and D'USSE Cognac, and Chair of the KDA Board; Fred B. Noe III, James B. Beam 7th generation Master Distiller, who was appointed by Chris Morris, Governor of the Order of the Writ; and Andrea Wilson, Michter's Chief Operating Officer and Master of Maturation, who was appointed by Eric Gregory, KDA President.

Each year, the group carefully reviews applications submitted by KDA member distilleries through a comprehensive and confidential process, with no more than five inductee honors awarded annually in three categories of distinction: Industry, Roll of Honor and Lifetime Achievement.

The 2026 Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame ceremony was presented by Buzick Construction Inc.

The Hall of Fame Signature Toast was sponsored by The Kroger Company and Kroger Chris' Picks.

The livestream of the induction ceremony was sponsored by the Bourbon Pursuit, the Official Podcast of Bourbon and co-hosted by Kenny Coleman and Ryan Cecil along with Chris Blandford, Adult Beverage Specialist for Kentucky, Southern Indiana, and Southern Illinois Kroger stores. It can be viewed on the Bourbon Pursuit YouTube page@BourbonPursuit.

Additional sponsors include American Whiskey Scholar, Bluegrass Bitters, Elmwood Inn Fine Teas, Independent Stave Company, Kern's Kitchen Derby Pie, Louisville Distilling Co./Angel's Envy Distillery, Peggy Noe Stevens & Associates, Signarama Downtown, and Vendome Copper & Brass Works Inc.

The Kentucky Distillers' Association commissioned glassblowing artist Brook Forrest White, Jr. of Flame Run in Louisville to craft unique and contemporary awards that incorporate Bourbon-inspired motifs such as amber colors, oak, copper and water.

Joel E. Ford, owner of Kentucky Cut Stone, located in Lancaster, was commissioned to craft the natural-cut limestone award bases.

ALLISON BALL
AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Independent Auditor's Report

To the People of Kentucky
The Honorable Andy Beshear, Governor
HollyM. Johnson, Secretary
Finance and Administration Cabinet
The Honorable Timothy Graves, Washington County Judge/Executive
The Honorable Jerry Pinkston, Washington County Sheriff
Members of the Washington County Fiscal Court

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statement

Opinions

We have audited the accompanying Washington County Sheriff's Settlement - 2024 Taxes for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025 - Regulatory Basis, and the related notes to the financial statement, which collectively comprise the Washington County Sheriff's financial statement as listed in the table of contents.

Unmodified Opinion on Regulatory Basis of Accounting

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statement presents fairly, in all material respects, the taxes charged, credited, and paid for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025 of the Washington County Sheriff, in accordance with the basis of accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the Commonwealth of Kentucky as described in Note 1.

Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

In our opinion, because of the significance of the matter discussed in the Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles section of our report, the financial statement does not present fairly, in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, the taxes charged, credited, and paid of the Washington County Sheriff, for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025.

Basis for Opinions

We conducted our audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS) and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards,* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, and the *Audit Program for Sheriffs' Tax Settlements.* Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Washington County Sheriff and to meet our other ethical responsibilities, in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audit. We believe the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinions.

Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

As described in Note 1 of the financial statement, the financial statement is prepared by the Washington County Sheriff on the basis of accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws, which is a basis of accounting other than accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. The effects on the financial statement of the variances between the regulatory basis of accounting described in Note 1 and accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, although not reasonably determinable, are presumed to be material and pervasive.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statement

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statement in accordance with accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws. Management is also responsible for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of a financial statement that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Washington County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for twelve months beyond the financial statement date, including any currently known information that may raise substantial doubt shortly thereafter.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statement as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinions. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not an absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with GAAS will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgement made by a reasonable user based on the financial statement.

In performing an audit in accordance with GAAS, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statement, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statement.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Washington County Sheriff's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statement.
- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Washington County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant findings, and certain internal control-related matters that we identified during the audit.

Other Reporting Required by *Government Auditing Standards*

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards,* we have also issued our report dated July 10, 2026, on our consideration of the Washington County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and on our tests of its compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts and grant agreements, and other matters. The purpose of that report is to describe the scope of our testing of internal control over financial reporting and compliance and the results of that testing, and not to provide an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting or on compliance. That report is an integral part of an audit performed in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* in considering the Washington County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and compliance.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Ball
Allison Ball
Auditor of Public Accounts
Frankfort, Ky

July 10, 2026

State law requires the Auditor of Public Accounts to annually audit fiscal courts, county clerks, and sheriffs; and print the results in a newspaper having general circulation in the county. The complete audit and any other audit of state agencies, fiscal courts, county clerks, sheriffs, and property valuation administrators may be viewed in the reports section of the Auditor of Public Accounts' website at auditor.ky.gov or upon request by calling 1-800-247-9126.

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