

SAVOR THE STATE

WHERE HOSPITALITY SPURS PROSPERITY



MOVING TEXAS
FORWARD

POWERED BY



Texas Lyceum 2026
Public Conference
San Antonio, TX
Apr 23rd-25th

SAVOR THE STATE:
WHERE HOSPITALITY
SPURS PROSPERITY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SAVOR THE STATE:
WHERE HOSPITALITY SPURS PROSPERITY

Welcome to San Antonio, Texas — a city where history, culture, and economic vitality converge. As we gather during FIESTA, one of Texas' most vibrant celebrations of heritage and community, San Antonio provides a fitting backdrop for meaningful dialogue and connection.

The Texas Lyceum is proud to host our 2026 Public Conference, "**Savor the State: Where Hospitality Spurs Prosperity**," from April 23–25. This gathering invites us to explore Texas hospitality not only as a defining cultural tradition, but as a powerful economic engine shaping communities across our state.

We begin by reflecting on the cultural roots of Texas hospitality — the traditions and shared experiences that define how Texans gather and connect. From there, our discussions examine how food tells the Texas story and how our culinary identity continues to evolve.

Throughout the conference, we will explore the policies, workforce dynamics, and economic forces shaping Texas' food and hospitality industries. From small business growth and entrepreneurship to tourism and regional development, these conversations highlight how hospitality drives prosperity across Texas. We will also consider emerging sectors and enduring traditions that contribute to the strength and diversity of our state's culinary landscape.

I extend my sincere thanks to Lyceum Directors **Cary Dupuy '21, Honorable Leah Robertson '23 and Michael Limas '25** for their leadership in curating our off-the-record conversations and elite access.

To our association managers **Logan Beszterda** and **Marine Bibes** for their careful orchestration of this conference to provide everyone a unique experience. Lastly thank you to our generous sponsors whose support makes this all possible.

We invite you to engage fully, savor the rich traditions of Fiesta, and contribute to the civil discourse that has defined the Texas Lyceum for nearly five decades. Together, through dialogue and shared purpose, we will continue Moving Texas Forward. Viva Fiesta and Viva the Lyceum!

Yours in service,

JR Treviño '20
2026 President



MEETING CHAIRS' MESSAGE

SAVOR THE STATE:
WHERE HOSPITALITY SPURS PROSPERITY

Welcome to the Texas Lyceum's 2026 Public Conference, "Savor the State: Where Hospitality Spurs Prosperity", and welcome to San Antonio, a city that so perfectly embodies the heart, history, and hospitality of Texas.

This year's conference celebrates something Texans instinctively understand: **hospitality is more than tradition, it is a powerful engine of opportunity**. Across our state, restaurants, regional cuisines, and culinary innovators are doing far more than feeding communities. They are fueling tourism, supporting small businesses, strengthening local economies, and shaping Texas's future.

Over the next few days, we will gather chefs, entrepreneurs and policymakers, creatives and community leaders to explore how food and hospitality connect culture to commerce. Through thoughtful conversations and unforgettable culinary experiences, we will examine how Texas cuisine tells our story, attracts investment, and drives economic development in communities large and small.

We hope you will leave inspired by the excellence you encounter, the relationships you build, and the role hospitality plays in sustaining a prosperous Texas. Thank you for joining us, and welcome to a celebration of the people, places, and flavors that make our state exceptional.



CARY
DUPUY '21

MEETING CHAIR



MICHAEL
LIMAS '25

MEETING CHAIR



LEAH
ROBERTSON '23

MEETING CHAIR

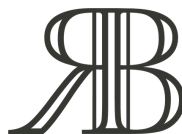
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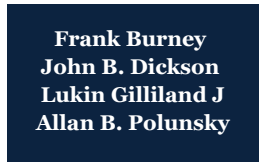
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BRET PIATT, *PRESIDENT ELECT*

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THE TEXAS LYCEUM

UPCOMING 2026 CONFERENCES

LOOK FOR THE HELPERS: DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN TEXAS

San Juan, Puerto Rico | June 3-5

CLASSROOM TO COMMERCE: FUELING THE TEXAS WORKFORCE PIPELINE

Sherman | September 24-26

CONSTRUCTING OUR PATH: HOW WE BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Galveston | November 12-14

THANK YOU TO THE CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

MEETING CHAIRS:

CARY DUPUY '21, MICHAEL LIMAS '25
LEAH ROBERTSON '23

HONORARY ALUMNI CHAIRS:

FRANK BURNEY '87, LUKIN GILLILAND JR '93,
RAY FLORES '18

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LORI CASTILLO '24	SUKH KAUR '26
MORGAN CRAVEN '25	MORGAN LAMANTIA '26
ANITA FERNANDEZ '25	MICHELLE MARTINEZ '25
JONATHAN FOMBONNE '25	STEVEN PEDIGO '24
ADRIANA GARCIA ROCHA '22	KAREN WARD '25
JEN WILDER '24	

LYCEUM MANAGEMENT TEAM

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THURSDAY APRIL 23, 2026

Thursday and Friday Dresscode:

We encourage "Fiesta chic" - a style that blends festive, colorful, Latin-inspired flair with a polished, stylish look. Think celebratory and vibrant!

5:20 PM - **Shuttle departure from Hotel Emma and Thompson Hotel**

Pope Francis Venue

5:45 PM — **Welcome Reception**

6:15 PM — **Dinner**

6:45 PM — **Opening Welcome**

Speaker: Michael Limas, Michael J. Limas & Associates, *Lyceum Class of 2025*

6:50 PM — **Welcome to San Antonio**

Speaker: Sukh Kaur, Councilwoman, *Lyceum Class of 2026*

6:55 PM — **Welcome from Industry**

Speaker: Dr Emily Williams Knight, Texas Restaurant Association and Texas Restaurant Foundation

7:15 PM — **Fireside Chat - Cultural Roots of Texas Hospitality**

Moderator: Tam Hawkins, Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce, *Lyceum Class of 2018*

Speakers:

- Chef Jorge Luis Hernandez, Emmer & Rye Hospitality Group, Pullman Market
- Chef Mayank Istwal, Musaafer by The Spice Route Co.

8:40 PM — **Shuttle departure**

Hotel Emma - Sternewirth Bar

9-11 PM — **Hospitality Suite**

FRIDAY APRIL 24, 2026

Boat Shuttles: Thanks to Go Rio and San Antonio River Authority, shuttle boats will loop between 7:30 and 8:30am from Thompson Hotel to Hotel Emma (4min walk from Hotel Emma to Stable Hall).

Stable Hall

7:45 AM — **Breakfast**

8:20 AM — **Welcome**

Speaker: Marina Gavito, Councilwoman, *Lyceum Class of 2023*

8:30 AM — **Tacos, Culture and the Texas Story**

Moderator: Mando Rayo, Tacos of Texas Podcast/United Tacos of America

Speakers:

- Chef Ana Liz Pulido, Ana Liz Taqueria
- Jose Ralat, Texas Monthly Taco Editor and Author of *American Tacos: A History and Guide*

9:30 AM — **Fellow Session: How Statewide Food Truck Reform Reshapes Culture, Power, and Opportunity in Texas**

Speakers:

- Sam Hopper, LBJ School of Public Affairs, UT Austin
- Devarier Smith, LBJ School of Public Affairs, UT Austin

10:00 AM — **Stirring the Pot: Proactive Policy for Texas' Culinary Scene**

Moderator: Casandra Matej, Visit Orlando, *Lyceum Class of 2017*

Speakers:

- Diego Bernal, Texas House of Representative
- Chef Diego Galicia, Mixtli
- Kelsey Streufert, Texas Restaurant Association

11:00 AM — ***The Workforce Behind the Welcome: How Labor Policies & Practices Shape Texas Hospitality***

Moderator: Ray Flores, Port of San Antonio, *Lyceum Class of 2018*

Speakers:

- Catarina Bill, Southern Smoke Foundation
- Chef Nicola Blaque, The Jerk Shack and Freight Fried Chicken
- Chef John Russ, The Clementine Restaurant Group, LLC

12:00 PM — ***Lunch***

12:40 PM — ***Texas Travel Alliance***

Speaker: Erica Boyd, Texas Travel Alliance, Texas Commercial Airports Association

12:50 PM — ***Deep Roots & Wide Horizons: The Past, Present, and Future of Texas Wine***

Speaker: Natalia Velikova, Texas Tech University

1:30 PM — ***Break***

Optional Excursions:

- ***Gathering at Hotel Emma at 2PM***
 - **Pearl: Then, Now, Next - Walkable from Hotel Emma**
 - **Pullman Market - Walkable from Hotel Emma**
- **** Shuttle departure from Hotel Emma at 2:30PM***
 - **ReRooted - Good Sense: Wine & Your Senses***
 - **RK Group - Behind the Scene Tour***

4:30 PM — ***Break***

5:30 PM — ***Shuttle to The Red Berry Estate***

The Red Berry Estate

6:00 PM — ***Cookbooks Presentation from UTSA, Cocktail and Dinner***

6:45 PM — ***Best in Texas H-E-B***

Moderator: Jenna Herrera, USAA, *Lyceum Class of 2019*

Speaker: Bill Anderson, H-E-B

7:15 PM — ***Michelin Guide and Tourism***

Moderator: Jonathan Fombonne, Harris County Attorney's Office, *Lyceum Class of 2025*

Speaker: Jorge Franz, Houston First

7:45 PM — ***Fireside Chat - Recognized Culinary Success in Texas***

Moderator: Michael Limas, Michael J. Limas & Associates, *Lyceum Class of 2025*

Speakers:

- Chef Sylvia Casares, Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen

8:45 PM — ***Shuttle departure***

The Monarch Hotel - Aleteo Bar

9:15 PM — ***Hospitality Suite***

**SATURDAY
APRIL 26, 2026**

Directors & Alumni only

8:00 - **Shuttle departure from Thompson Hotel**

Hotel Emma

8:00 AM — ***Breakfast***

9:00 AM — ***Board Meeting***

Evening — ***Flambeau Parade - Mandatory registration***

MEET THE SPEAKERS

SAVOR THE STATE:
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BILL ANDERSON

PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE VP
*H-E-B'S SAN ANTONIO FOOD
DRUG RETAIL DIVISION -
CENTRAL MARKET*

Bill Anderson serves as President of Central Market and Executive Vice President of the H-E-B's San Antonio Food Drug Retail Division. Our 10 Central Market stores and almost 5,000 Partners (employees) across the state create a destination experience for our customers to enhance their lives through great food. The San Antonio Food Drug Division is made up of 110 stores and over 30,000 Partners with a geography from Kerrville to Brownsville including the cities of San Antonio, New Braunfels, Laredo, Harlingen and McAllen.

Bill joined H-E-B in 1991 as a Store Management Trainee in Waco, Texas, eventually becoming a Top Store Leader. He has held numerous leadership roles in Own Brand Product Development, Advertising, our Border Region, and Procurement.

In 2006, Bill became Vice President of General Merchandise, and later added Drugstore, Beauty and Floral to his responsibilities. During this time, he was part of the team tasked with developing and opening a new plus! store format.

Bill serves on the Board of Trustees at The Witte Museum. He is also on the South Central Regional Advisory Board for Canine Companions.

Bill graduated from Baylor University in 1991 with a BBA in marketing. In 2008, he completed the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School.



DIEGO BERNAL

**STATE REPRESENTATIVE,
HOUSE DISTRICT 123**
*TEXAS HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES*

Representative Diego Bernal was born in South Texas and raised in San Antonio. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he returned to San Antonio permanently as a MALDEF staff attorney, advocating and litigating on behalf of working people, children, and immigrant communities.

Representative Bernal was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in February 2015 to represent District 123. He currently serves as the Vice Chairman of the House Committee on Public Education and is a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means and the House Permanent Standing Subcommittee on Property Tax Appraisals.



CATARINA BILL

CHIEF MISSION OFFICER
SOUTHERN SMOKE FOUNDATION

Catarina is a dedicated community leader focused on supporting the food and beverage industry nationwide through awareness, resource development, and mission-driven service. She began her nonprofit career in 2004 with the Greater Houston American Red Cross and has since held positions with organizations across Texas and New York, building a strong foundation in impact-driven work.

Since joining Southern Smoke Foundation in 2020, she has played a key role in expanding its national reach and now serves as Chief Mission Officer. In this role, she oversees the Foundation's service initiatives, including the Emergency Relief Fund and the Behind You mental health program.

Catarina is also a partner in her family's South Texas meat processing business, providing a grounded, firsthand perspective on the challenges and resilience within the service and agricultural industries.



NICOLA BLAQUE

CHEF AND OWNER

*THE JERK SHACK AND FREIGHT
FRIED CHICKEN*

Chef Nicola Blaque is a nationally acclaimed restaurateur and Army veteran behind San Antonio favorites The Jerk Shack and Freight Fried Chicken. A Jamaican immigrant, she builds food rooted in heritage, storytelling, and community.

Since opening in 2018, The Jerk Shack has earned national recognition from GQ, Eater, Forbes, and Food & Wine, and received the Michelin Bib Gourmand in both 2024 and 2025, a landmark honor for Caribbean cuisine in Texas.

In 2024, she opened Freight Fried Chicken in the historic Pearl district, a concept honoring the legacy of women who sold fried chicken after the Civil War. Freight was named Best New Restaurant by San Antonio Magazine and has garnered national attention.

A James Beard Award nominee, two-time CultureMap Chef of the Year, and CIA-San Antonio graduate, Chef Blaque serves on the Visit San Antonio Culinary Board, is a culinary advisor to the San Antonio Food Bank, a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier, and was named to the 2026 Texas 100.



ERIKA BOYD

PRESIDENT & CEO

*TEXAS TRAVEL ALLIANCE, TEXAS
COMMERCIAL AIRPORTS
ASSOCIATION*

Erika Boyd is the President & CEO of the Texas Travel Alliance, the leading advocate for the travel industry in Texas. She also serves as the President of the Texas Tourism Foundation and the Executive Director for the Texas Commercial Airports Association, managed by TTA.

Erika is a native Texan, born and raised in New Braunfels. She has worked in nonprofit leadership, communication, and advocacy roles for most of her career, working with travel, law enforcement, and underprivileged children. She recently served on the Texas Statewide Economic Development Plan Advisory Board and the Governor's Small Business Freedom Council and currently serves on the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's State Parks Advisory Board, the Board of the Hospitality Educators Association of Texas, and the San Antonio Visitor Alliance Board. Erika is also actively involved in her children's schools as a room mom, middle school Band Boosters Board President, and PTA supporter. She is married and has two children, Henry and Grace, a rescue Lab named Rizzo, and is a proud graduate of the University of Texas. Hook 'em Horns!



SYLVIA CASARES

OWNER

SYLVIA'S ENCHILADA KITCHEN

Known as The Enchilada Queen, Sylvia Casares is chef/owner of Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen, where she serves 20 varieties of hand-rolled enchiladas alongside Tex-Mex favorites.

Born in Brownsville, Texas, she developed a passion for flavor early and earned a BS from the University of Texas. She later worked as a food scientist for Uncle Ben's before opening her first restaurant in 1998.

Casares published "The Enchilada Queen Cookbook" and launched Sylvia's Signature Sauces. She is a James Beard Awards semifinalist.

MEET THE SPEAKERS

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JORGE FRANZ

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
TOURISM AND INDUSTRY
RELATIONS / TOURISM
HOUSTONFIRST

Jorge Franz serves as Senior Vice President of Tourism and Industry Relations for Houston First Corporation. Franz is a 20+ year veteran at the company and oversees two departments including the Tourism department and the Houston Film Commission.

The Tourism Department is tasked with promotion and sales of Houston as a leisure destination to the travel trade industry in both domestic and international markets.

Franz most recently served as President of the organization previously known as the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau where he oversaw operations of the organization as well as interaction and value delivery for more than 800 members. During his tenure, he oversaw the transition and re-brand of the organization to the Houston Hospitality Alliance. Franz is very active in the Tourism sector. He is a past Chair of the Texas Travel Alliance as well as Secretary of the Texas Association of CVBs. He has also served as Chair of the Governor of Texas' Tourism Advisory Committee and on Expedia's Media Solutions Select Board.

Franz was born in Santiago, Chile and has lived in Chile, Venezuela, Spain and the United States. He has also personally represented Houston around the world, working closely with several Houston mayors to attract visitors to Houston



DIEGO GALICIA

CHEF AND CO-OWNER
MIXTLI

Chef Diego Galicia is the chef and co-owner of Mixtli, a nationally acclaimed Mexican fine-dining restaurant in San Antonio, Texas. Born in Toluca, Mexico, Chef Galicia brings a deeply personal perspective to his cuisine, drawing inspiration from the rich cultural and regional diversity of his home country.

After moving to Texas, he briefly studied psychology at the University of Texas at San Antonio before graduating from the Culinary Institute of America. His career includes experience in Mexico and at Michelin-starred restaurants in Chicago and San Francisco, shaping his refined yet rooted culinary voice.

In 2013, Galicia co-founded Mixtli with chef Rico Torres, creating an evolving tasting-menu concept that explores the history, geography, and flavors of Mexico. The restaurant has earned widespread recognition, including being named Food & Wine Best New Chefs (2017) and receiving multiple James Beard nominations, along with a Michelin star for its innovative approach to Mexican gastronomy.

Through his work, Galicia continues to push contemporary Mexican cuisine forward while honoring its traditions, using food as a storytelling medium that connects guests to Mexico's past and present.



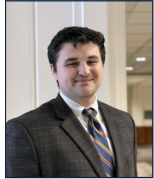
JORGE LUIS HERNANDEZ

CORPORATE CHEF FOR
INNOVATION/R&D,

*EMMER & RYE HOSPITALITY
GROUP, PULLMAN MARKET*

Jorge Luis Hernández is a San Antonio-born chef with extensive culinary experience, trained at the Culinary Institute of America. As Corporate Chef for Emmer & Rye Hospitality Group, he pioneers innovative techniques and chef-driven menus, earning national recognition at the 2025 Texas MICHELIN Awards, where his restaurants received multiple honors, including MICHELIN Stars and Green Stars.

Previously, he held various prestigious positions, including Head Chef at minibar by José Andrés and Executive Chef at the Hotel Emma, earning accolades like a 2-star Michelin rating and recognition in top culinary lists. Outside of work, he enjoys his family's ranch, music, reading, and exploring coffee and cocktails.



SAMUEL HOPPER

MPAFF CANDIDATE

*LBJ SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
UT AUSTIN*

Samuel Hopper is a Master of Public Affairs candidate at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. He holds a BA in Political Science and Economics from Trinity University. Samuel currently works as a Transportation Planner at The Goodman Corporation and contributes specialized transportation research for the City of Austin through his LBJ Policy Research Project.

His professional and research experience spans rural land grant policy, foster care systems, economic development, and transportation planning. His work focuses on advancing efficient transportation systems that support economic growth, improve mobility, and strengthen communities across Texas



MAYANK ISTWAL

CULINARY DIRECTOR AND
CORPORATE EXECUTIVE CHEF

*MUSAAFER BY THE SPICE ROUTE
CO.*

Chef Mayank is the Michelin star Chef recipient in November 2024 and again maintaining in October 2025. He is the CULINARY DIRECTOR AND CORPORATE EXECUTIVE CHEF at Musaafer Houston and New York and recognized by Conde Nast Traveler as one of the top 13 chefs bringing Indian Cuisine to the world.

With a blend of expertise, passion, and encyclopedic knowledge of spices, ingredients, and textures, Chef Mayank offers a neoteric Indian dining experience. Situated within Musaafer (meaning "The Traveller"), nestled in Houston's luxurious Galleria at Westheimer and Sage, guests can expect a stunning and expertly curated setting to savor his culinary creations. In September of 2025, Musaafer opened their second location at 133 Duane Street in the Hope Building in TriBeCa New York.



CASANDRA MATEJ

PRESIDENT AND CEO

VISIT ORLANDO

Casandra Matej is president and CEO of Visit Orlando, the official destination marketing organization for America's most visited destination.

She leads global branding, marketing, and sales efforts on behalf of 1,600 member companies across Orlando's tourism industry. Since joining Visit Orlando in 2021, she has guided the destination's recovery, welcoming 75 million visitors in 2024 and generating \$92.5 billion in economic impact.

Prior to Visit Orlando, she served as President & CEO of Visit San Antonio for 10 years. Matej serves as vice chair of the U.S. Travel Association Executive Board, and is a proud native Texan and Texas Lyceum Alumni, Class of 2017.

MEET THE SPEAKERS

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ANA LIZ PULIDO

CHEF OWNER

ANA LIZ TAQUERIA

Chef Ana Liz Pulido is the chef and owner of Ana Liz Taqueria in Mission, Texas, a celebrated destination for Rio Grande Valley-style Mexican cuisine. Raised in South Texas and deeply influenced by her family's roots in Mexico, Pulido developed her culinary foundation working alongside her father in his taquerias, where she learned the rhythms, techniques, and traditions of everyday Mexican cooking. Pulido later refined her skills through formal culinary training before returning to her hometown to open Ana Liz Taqueria, where she brings a thoughtful, ingredient-driven approach to regional Mexican food.

Her cooking highlights handmade tortillas, housemade salsas, and time-honored techniques, elevating familiar dishes while remaining grounded in tradition and community. The taqueria has become known for its sense of place, celebrating the flavors and cultural identity of the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

Her work has earned widespread critical acclaim, including being named James Beard Foundation Award winner for Best Chef: Texas in 2024, marking a historic moment for Rio Grande Valley cuisine and solidifying her role as a leading voice in contemporary MexicanAmerican cooking. Rooted in heritage and guided by precision, Chef Pulido continues to shine a national spotlight on the culinary richness of South Texas, using food as a means to honor culture, family, and community.



JOSÉ R. RALAT

TACO EDITOR AND AUTHOR OF AMERICAN TACOS: A HISTORY AND GUIDE

TEXAS MONTHLY

José R. Ralat is Texas Monthly's taco editor, writing about tacos and Mexican food. He is the author of *American Tacos: A History & Guide*, now in an expanded and revised paperback edition.

Ralat has written for *Eater*, *Imbibe*, *Dallas Observer*, *D Magazine*, *Vice*, *Cowboys & Indians* magazine, *Gravy*, and other national and regional online and print media outlets.

Ralat is also a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and serves on the advisory board of *Foodways Texas*. In 2022 and 2023, he won James Beard awards for his *Tex-Mex* explainer column.



MANDO RAYO

TACO JOURNALIST

TACOS OF TEXAS PODCAST / UNITED TACOS OF AMERICA

Mando Rayo's experience is deep-rooted in Latino & BIPOC communities and is a 2022 James Beard Foundation Awards finalist and winner of two Signal Awards for podcasting. Mando is a digital story-teller and uses his Latino identity to inspire and build bridges through his production company, *IDENTITY*.

Mando is the host and producer of the *Tacos of Texas* Podcast, a partnership with KUT & KUTX Studios/Texas Standard. Mando is also the cofounder of *The New Philanthropists*, an organization that brings representation and inclusion to nonprofit boards.



JOHN RUSS

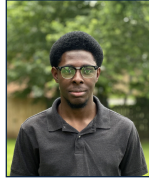
OWNER/CHEF

*THE CLEMENTINE RESTAURANT
GROUP, LLC*

Chef John Russ, a New Orleans native, is a 2023 James Beard Award finalist for Best Chef: Texas and co-owner of Clementine in San Antonio, which he opened with his wife, Elise, in 2018.

He studied at Delgado Culinary in New Orleans and trained in fine dining at the Ritz-Carlton and with The Capella Group. Today, he leads a restaurant rooted in seasonality, local sourcing, and thoughtful hospitality.

Russ actively works at the intersection of food and policy, advocating for sustainable agriculture, workforce development, and a resilient supply chain, reflecting a broader commitment to civic engagement and leadership shaping the Texas food system.



DEVARIER SMITH

TEXAS LYCEUM FELLOW

*LBJ SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
UT AUSTIN*

Devarier Smith is a Master of Public Affairs candidate at UT Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs and will graduate in May 2026. Originally from Kentucky, he earned his bachelor's degree in Urban Studies from the University of Louisville. His work sits at the intersection of urban planning and public policy, with a focus on economic development and housing/homelessness.

Devarier's professional experience includes policy analysis in both the Texas and Kentucky legislatures, serving as an educator, and supporting regional community and economic development planning efforts in rural Kentucky. In 2026, he was selected as a Texas Lyceum Fellow.



KELSEY STREUFERT

CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
OFFICER

*TEXAS RESTAURANT
ASSOCIATION*

Kelsey Erickson Streufert is a licensed attorney and Texas Capitol veteran serving as chief public affairs officer for the Texas Restaurant Association. In this role, Kelsey represents Texas' largest private sector employer in government and the media.

Beginning her TRA career during COVID-19, Kelsey helped secure critical lifelines including alcohol to-go, the PPP Flexibility Act, and recovery grants. Since then, she has led the TRA through several successful legislative sessions, passing over 20 priority bills and blocking every bill the association opposed.

A double Longhorn, when Kelsey isn't working, she's usually enjoying time outdoors with her family and three dogs.



NATALIA VELIKOVA

PROFESSOR OF WINE
MARKETING

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Dr. Natalia Velikova is a Professor of Wine Marketing at Texas Tech University. She also serves as the Associate Director of the Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute. Natalia teaches courses in wine business, wine tourism, wine appreciation, and Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET®) qualifications. Her research focuses on wine consumer behavior, emerging wine markets, and wine tourism. Dr. Velikova is a recipient of two Fulbright U.S. Scholar awards (to Bulgaria and the Republic of Georgia).

Dedicated to professional service, Dr. Velikova actively engages with the broader wine community, presenting her research at numerous industry conferences and professional meetings.



EMILY WILLIAMS KNIGHT

PRESIDENT AND CEO

*TEXAS RESTAURANT
ASSOCIATION AND TEXAS
RESTAURANT FOUNDATION*

Dr. Emily Williams Knight, Ed.D., is President and CEO of the Texas Restaurant Association and Foundation, representing the state's largest private sector employer with 58,000 locations and 1.5 million workers. A nationally recognized leader, Emily drives innovation, thought leadership, and workforce solutions that shape the hospitality sector far beyond Texas.

With over 20 years of global experience, Emily has held leadership roles at Study Group, Kendall College, Pearson, Pizza Hut, and Marriott. A sought-after speaker and advocate, she champions growth, grit, and opportunity—values she honed as the proud daughter of military veterans and the mother of twin daughters.

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