

# PRAM

Public Relations Association of Mississippi



April 2-4, 2023  
Cadence Bank Conference Center

# Welcome

to Tupelo and the 2023 State PRAM Conference

## Matt Martin, APR

2023 State PRAM President



Oh, well, a-bless my soul, it's so good to be back in the talented company of the royalty of Mississippi's public relations community for what promises to be an electric conference in Tupelo, the first TVA city.

We'll spend the next two days being inspired and energized in the same spirit as Tupelo's most cherished son as we get "All Shook Up" to bring transformative public relations back to our businesses, clients, and customers.

The influence won't just melodically emanate from the stage. Between sets, I look forward to joining the chorus of information shared in conversation, creating new professional rhythms, conduits, contacts, and friends.

Finally, special thanks to our Conference Chair, Robin McKinney, for fronting this band and to Jennie Bradford Curlee, APR, for conducting the background orchestra of the generously friendly members of PRAM Northeast and the Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau who infectiously promote a "Burning Love" for their city.

So, heeeeeeeeeee, Tupelo! Let's Rock!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Martin', enclosed within a large, stylized circular outline.

**Matt Martin**  
2023 PRAM State  
President



# 2023 State PRAM Board of Directors

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Kim Foster, APR • Northeast



# Breakfast

Monday, April 3 • 9:00 to 10:15 a.m.  
Sweetgum Room

## Tonia Morris

CEO & Founder, Simply HR



### **The Strength of Diversity: Celebrating Generational Differences in the Workplace**

The workplace is becoming increasingly multi-generational, with traditionalists, baby boomers, Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z all working side by side. By recognizing and celebrating the unique strengths and perspectives of each generation, organizations can create a more inclusive and productive workplace. This topic explores strategies for building effective cross-generational teams, addressing generational conflicts, and leveraging generational diversity for workplace success. By creating a culture that values and respects generational differences, organizations can tap into the full potential of their workforce and drive innovation and growth.

#### **Bio**

Tonia is a sought-after speaker who has made a name for herself in bridging the gap between different generations in the workplace.

Tonia has dedicated her career to educating leaders and organizations on how to create a workplace that is generational inclusive. Her insights on generational diversity and its impact on the workplace have helped numerous organizations successfully navigate the complexities of multi-generational teams.

In recognition of her pioneering work in this field, Tonia was awarded the prestigious Stevie Award for "Generational Maverick of the Year." This award highlights her tireless efforts in transforming today's workplace by fostering an environment of inclusivity and respect.

With over two decades of HR leadership experience, Tonia is a true culture transformation expert. She has an innate ability to connect with audiences and is known for her engaging, interactive, and thought-provoking presentations. Her passion for bridging the gap between generations is contagious, and her expertise is invaluable.

# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Oak Room

## Jae-Hwa Shin,

Ph.D., MPH, MBA, APR

Professor of Public Relations,  
University of Southern Mississippi



### All About Belonging and Culture! Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Public Relations Today

This session will feature the emerging call for a new narrative about diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and culture in public relations profession and education. It is about who we are and how we can make difference in a society and a larger context. This is in line with increasing need for diversity, equity and inclusion and will ultimately shape a more complete picture of our profession.

Some questions which will be addressed through the session include:

- How do you define diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and culture?
- What have been the main concerns and discussions of interest, and especially for public relations practice and education today?
- What do you see as the most crucial emerging trends in public relations in the next few years? What will be the future directions of public relations from the perspective of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and culture?
- Would you offer any insight into public relations practice, lessons and action items from diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and culture?

### Bio

Jae-Hwa Shin, Ph.D., MPH, MBA, APR is professor of public relations in the School of Communication at the University of Southern Mississippi. She has served as public relations sequence head and is currently serving as the strategic communication program lead. She is a faculty advisor for the USM PRSSA Chapter. She holds a doctorate from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and her research focuses on public relations from a strategic conflict management perspective across cultural settings in social media environments.

Her publications include numerous journal articles and book chapters. She has co-authored books that include widely used textbooks, *Public Relations Today: Managing Conflict and Competition*, and *Think: Public Relations*. Her latest publication, *Public Relations Theory: Capabilities and Competencies*, co-authored with Robert Heath, received the 2021 PRIDE award from National Communication Association. Her most known publication is *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*, widely circulated among educators, scholars and professionals.

She is a member of the editorial board of *Journal of Public Relations Research*. Before her academic career, she was the communication director for Korea Economic Research Institute and Center for Free Enterprise of the Federation of Korean Industries, which was founded in 1961 by multinational corporate members such as Samsung, LG, SK, and other industry leaders.

# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Magnolia Room

## Kevin Kern

Vice-President, Public Relations,  
Memphis Tourism



## Jennie Bradford Curlee, APR

Public Relations & International Sales  
Director, Tupelo Convention and  
Visitors Bureau



### PR Partnerships: Showcasing Memphis & Mississippi to the World

Creative partnerships make the world go round. Showcasing tourism destinations on a global stage takes strategic public relations efforts and inventive activations to stand out. This session shares how Memphis Tourism and Tupelo Convention & Visitors Bureau partner to invite visitors from all over the world to experience Memphis & Mississippi.

## Notes



## Bios

Kevin Kern is the Vice President of Public Relations for Memphis Tourism, leading global media outreach initiatives and serving as a proud ambassador for the Home of Blues, Soul & Rock 'n' Roll. The Memphis destination is known for its rich music legacy, live music scene and a culinary scene that includes over 115 smokin' BBQ restaurants. Showcasing all that makes our city a great place to live, work and visit is Kern's true passion.

Prior to joining the Memphis Tourism communications team in May of 2017, Kern served as the Director of Public Relations for Elvis Presley Enterprises & Graceland for over twelve years where he worked with numerous with media outlets along with film and television projects that focused on the King of Rock 'n' Roll and his famous Memphis mansion. During his time at Graceland, Kern also led communications efforts around the visits of a US President, Japanese Prime Minister and British royals, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry of Wales. Outside of attraction and hotel publicity efforts for Elvis Presley's Graceland, Kern worked closely with SONY Music to promote re-mix, duet and re-mastered album releases, along with a global licensing program that featured well over two-thousand Elvis themed products in territories around the world.

Kern previously worked as a reporter at WREG-TV News Channel 3 in Memphis, in addition to stations in Kentucky and Louisiana where he served as a U.S. Military beat reporter, covering the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division and the 2nd Bomb Wing of the U.S. Air Force.

A native Memphian, Kern studied Electronic Media Journalism at Middle Tennessee State University, but bleeds Tiger blue for our hometown University Of Memphis athletic teams, along with the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies. Most recently, he was selected as one of the Memphis Business Journal's "Business of PRIDE Outstanding Voices" series for 2021 as part of editorial coverage of the local LGBTQ+ business community.

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As Public Relations and International Sales Director for the Tupelo Convention & Visitors Bureau, Jennie Bradford Curlee inspires visitation to the birthplace of Elvis Presley. She previously served as Director of Corporate Communications for the Community Development Foundation, where she worked on the team that recruited Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Mississippi to Northeast Mississippi.

Jennie Bradford earned the Tourism Marketing Professional certification through Southeast Tourism Society in 2015, and was honored as the fourteen-state tourism organization's Rising Star in 2014. A member of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM), she served as president of the statewide organization in 2017 and served as president of PRAM's parent organization, the Southern Public Relations Federation in 2018. She was named one of Mississippi's Top 50 Under 40 by the Mississippi Business Journal in 2016.

Jennie Bradford earned the Accreditation in Public Relations certification in 2021 through the Universal Accreditation Board. Her work in public relations has garnered numerous awards including the William A. Taylor Best of Show Award at the Southern Public Relations Federation's Lantern Awards in 2018. She received a Public Relations Society of America Bronze Anvil Award in 2020 for her work promoting Tupelo as an emerging culinary destination. She has won countless Public Relations Association of Mississippi PRISM Awards and Southern Public Relations Association Lantern Awards for her work in the field of public relations.

Jennie Bradford loves running and travel. She completed her first full marathon in 2019 as part of the Dopey Challenge at Disney World. She and her husband, John Curlee, spend most of their free time watching their son, Miles, play baseball.

# Lunch

Monday, April 3 • 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
Sweetgum Room

## Kristie Swink Benson, APR

Senior Vice President, Customer  
Service, Communications and  
Marketing, Washington Metropolitan  
Area Transit Authority



### C is for Crisis

Veteran communicator Kristie Swink Benson, APR, will lead an engaging Q&A session about crisis communications. Bring your most pressing questions to ask about handling a PR crisis!

### Bio

Kristie Swink Benson, APR, is the senior vice president of customer service, communications, and marketing for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro) where she leads a team of professionals that are focused on improving the customer experience through clear and concise messaging,

Since joining Metro in October 2021, Benson has managed all crisis communications while simultaneously elevating a “what’s right” narrative to build the brand and repair the reputation of the most essential public transportation providers in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

Prior to joining Metro, Benson served as director of communications for the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. During her tenure, she used marketing and communications as a catalyst to build an exceptional brand reflecting the High’s priorities of growth, inclusivity, collaboration, and connectivity.

As a communications executive, Benson has extensive experience leading organizations through crisis and providing strategic direction that connects organizational priorities.

She started her career more than a decade ago in local government and has since provided communications counsel to a variety of industries that include mental health, utilities, arts and culture, and transit.

Benson currently serves on the board of her Alma Mater, Winston Salem State University, and has held board roles for PRSA Georgia, Atlanta Interactive Marketing Association, Corporate Volunteer Council, and Art Marketing Museum Association. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a 2023 finalist for Women We Admire Top 50 Women Leaders of DC, 2021 PRSA Georgia Luminary Star Award recipient, and 2021 member of the Inspire Atlanta Class. Additionally, Benson is a member of the 2019 PRSA Georgia’s 40 under 40 Inaugural Class, a 2019 Phoenix Award and Georgia Excellence Award winner, a 2019 Chapter Champion, and a 2018 member of the American Express Leadership Academy.

As a professional dedicated to the craft of communications, Benson earned her Accreditation in Public Relations in June 2015, a prestigious designation given by the Universal Accreditation Board. She also holds a Master of Arts in Public Communication from American University (Washington, D.C.) and a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications from Winston-Salem State University (Winston Salem, NC).

# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 1:15 to 2:15 p.m.  
Oak Room

## Dr. Nicole Beachum

Assistant Professor of Marketing,  
University of Alabama at Birmingham



### Social Media in the Age of Misinformation

Learn about misinformation in social media and how it affects the work of public relations and marketing professionals, plus the steps that you can take to mitigate the risks.

#### Bio

Dr. Nicole Beachum is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where she teaches Digital Marketing. She holds a Ph.D. in Marketing from the University of South Alabama.

Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, and *Go-To-Market Strategies for Women Entrepreneurs*. Nicole has been in digital marketing for 14 years, starting out as a freelance writer and ultimately creating and running a digital marketing agency before going into academia.

She has a sweet 7-year-old daughter and loves coffee and being near water.



# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 1:15 to 2:15 p.m.  
Magnolia Room

## Dana Englebert

Founder and Chief Strategist,  
Dana Englebert | Purposeful  
Storyteller



### No Stack Needed: Simple Tools & Resources for a Team of One

Regularly, all the cool PR folks on social like to ask everyone about their “stack.” The answers vary, but it usually boils down to a contest about who has the coolest tech. Here’s my stack: a notebook, some awesome Sharpie pens, my laptop, a subscription to Harvest for my invoicing and payment, Google Workspace, and Wordpress. OK, so I use some free apps, too. No Meltwater. No Slack. As a solopreneur, I don’t want to spend more time managing my stack than I do on client work.

You can run a communications team-of-one with readily available tools and resources. Yes, there are some things that are worth the investment. I’ll show you some of my favorites so you and your team can achieve your goals.

### Bio

Dana Engelbert is the owner of her own freelance PR consulting and content development business. Since launching nearly 5 years ago, she has worked with clients large and small, partnered with agencies, and continues to seek new learning opportunities.

Dana led influencer outreach for the VP of consumer products at HP, generated the largest consumer attendance at the World Pork Expo, introduced wireless service to her home state, and authored some of the original consumer messaging for cable modems in the United States. Her work with high-end home building products landed her clients placement in leading design homes and on major renovation and home building shows.

For 5 years, she led the marketing communications efforts of Goodwill of the Heartland. During that time, revenue grew by more than 60% as she re-branded the region’s thrift stores and introduced a new messaging platform. Additionally, the region was in the top 5 of donations per capita and sales per capita despite being in the middle of Goodwill in size and population.

Dana is a Gen-Xer with 3 decades of experience - that means she carried a phone in a bag, didn’t have email at her first job, and learned how to code a website with HTML in grad school. Don’t hold any of that against her. She holds a BA in journalism and mass comm from the University of Iowa, is mom to 2, and married to her husband, Matt, and college football.

# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.  
Oak Room

## Brittney Westbrook

Associate Director for Marketing Communications, The University of Southern Mississippi - Office of University Communications



### Shake Up Your Content Strategy with Vertical Video

In just one month, the marketing communications team at The University of Southern Mississippi went from never uploading a vertical video to producing three to five new vertical videos a week. This shake-up in content strategy resulted in immediate and significant increases in video views, accelerated social media audience growth, and raised impressions and engagement—all without increasing the size of the team. This session will explain how that was done, what the results have been, and what the team is planning next.

During this session, you'll learn:

- How vertical video can improve your content strategy
- Tips for producing more videos in less time
- Strategies for dealing with trends—when to hop on and when to opt out

### Bio

With experience in strategic communications from marketing, public relations, branding, and creative perspectives, Brittney Westbrook fuses strategy development with creative execution to close gaps and deliver results.

In her role at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), she develops message and media strategies and leads creative ideation for USM's biggest campaigns. She leads an integrated cross-functional team working across social media, advertising, design, and video to increase brand visibility and build positive brand perception across stakeholder groups.

Westbrook earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design and a Master of Science in public relations from USM. She has received multiple local, state, and regional awards for her work in public relations, advertising, and graphic design.

She enjoys giving back to the next generation of communications professionals at USM through reviewing student portfolios, speaking to classes, and mentoring communications students.

She and her husband, Nathan, reside in Ellisville, Miss., with their children Dakota and Gunner.



# Notes



# Breakout

Monday, April 3 • 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.  
Magnolia Room

## Michael Riddle

Agency Partner, PushCrankPress



### Is a Hot Dog a Sandwich? And Other Bad Words for Burritos

Explore the power of communication from multiple perspectives, examining the role of religion, art, and algorithms in the development of language and symbolism. Discover how storytelling, memory, and creative exercises can be used to break out of mental ruts and generate new insights and ideas.

#### Bio

Mike Riddle is an accomplished artist, digital designer, and marketer passionate about creativity and community service. He graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in Illustration. He co-founded PushCrankPress, a highly successful digital design, development, and marketing firm based in Dothan, Alabama.

Mike remains deeply committed to serving his local community despite his busy work schedule. He currently serves as Board-Chair of the Murals of the Wiregrass and Vice-Chair of the Dothan Historic Preservation Commission. He has also been a three-time past President of AAF's Dothan Chapter and a five-year veteran of the Wiregrass Museum of Art's Board of Trustees.

Mike's commitment to service has not gone unnoticed, and he was honored as a recipient of the Dothan Area Young Professional's 20 under 40 in 2018. When he's not working or volunteering, Mike enjoys spending time with his family. He and his wife, Amy, will celebrate their eighth wedding anniversary in October and have a rambunctious three-year-old son that enjoys making up his own stories.



# Notes



# Agenda

## Sunday, April 2

- 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. PRAM State Board Meeting • Elm Room
- 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. Registration & Exhibitors
- 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. **Welcome Reception** • Queen's Reward Meadery  
Transportation available courtesy of Tupelo CVB

## Monday, April 3

- 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Registration & Exhibitors
- 9:00 - 10:15 a.m. **Breakfast Keynote** • Sweetgum Room  
**Tonia Morris** • The Strength of Diversity: Celebrating Generational Differences in the Workplace
- 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. **Breakout Sessions** • Oak and Magnolia Rooms  
**Dr. Jae-Hwa Shin** • All About Belonging and Culture! Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Public Relations Today  
**Kevin Kern & Jennie Bradford Curlee, APR** • PR Partnerships: Showcasing Memphis & Mississippi to the World
- 11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. **Lunch Keynote** • Sweetgum Room  
**Kristie Swink Benson, APR** • C is for Crisis
- 1:15 - 2:15 p.m. **Breakout Sessions** • Oak and Magnolia Rooms  
**Dr. Nicole Beachum** • Social Media in the Age of Misinformation  
**Dana Englebert** • No Stack Needed: Simple Tools & Resources for a Team of One
- 2:30 - 3:30 p.m. **Breakout Sessions** • Oak and Magnolia Rooms  
**Brittney Westbrook** • Shake Up Your Content Strategy with Vertical Video  
**Michael Riddle** • Is a Hot Dog a Sandwich? And Other Bad Words for Burritos
- 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. **PRism Awards Reception** • VIP Lounge
- 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. **PRism Awards Banquet** • Cherry Room

## Tuesday, April 4

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Registration & Exhibitors
9:00 - 10:15 a.m.	<b>Networking Breakfast</b> • Sweetgum Room
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Breakout Sessions • Oak and Magnolia Rooms <b>Corie Jones</b> • Volunteering Is Good PR <b>Melody Fisher, Ph.D.</b> • Blurred Lines: Public Relations Ethics
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	<b>Lunch Keynote</b> • Pine/Maple/Cedar Rooms <b>Ashley Elkins</b> • Just Jump Already! <b>Student PRisms and Student of the Year</b>

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Volunteer Service

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Bureau

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# 2023 PRism Awards

Monday, April 3 • Reception • 6:00 p.m. • VIP Lounge  
Banquet • 6:30 p.m. • Cherry Room

Emceed by:

## Brandon Bennett

Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist

### Recognizing the Best in Mississippi PR



The PRAM PRism Awards Program began in 2003 as a way to honor and recognize outstanding work produced in the field of public relations by practitioners within the state of Mississippi. Entries are judged by a reciprocal public relations chapter outside the geographical boundaries of the Southern Public Relations Federation — Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana.

Each entry is evaluated on its individual merit and scored on its adherence to the four-step RPIE process. The top programs and projects are honored with PRism Awards, while other notable entries are recognized with Awards of Excellence and Certificates of Merit.

After the initial round of judging is complete, a panel of three APRs comparatively rank the PRism winning entries in each tier to select the Best of Tier winner for long-term programs, short-term programs, and tactical projects. Once a winner is selected in each tier, the judges comparatively rank those three entries to determine the Best of Show winner.

### Bio

Brandon Bennett is a native of south Louisiana, and is known worldwide for his award-winning talent in the tribute industry. In his over 20 years in the business, Brandon has been a part of a diverse scene paying tribute to The Greatest Entertainer of our time, Elvis Presley.

Brandon was awarded the title of "Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist" by Elvis Presley Enterprises. His featured television appearances include "The Late Show with David Letterman," "The NBC Nightly News," "The Ricki Lake Show," and "American Hot Rod." He has held lead roles in the long-running, Elvis Presley Enterprises-endorsed music revue "The Elvis Story" and the Tony Award-winning musical "Million Dollar Quartet." He has made featured performances at professional sporting events for the Chicago Bulls, Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox, Chicago Bears, Memphis Grizzlies, and San Francisco Giants.

Brandon has the honor of working with members of several members of Elvis Presley's band, which include D.J. Fontana, The Sweet Inspirations, and The Jordanaires. Brandon has also been producing and starring in his own music revue, "Brandon Bennett: Elvis My Way," in which the focus is about the man, Elvis Presley, and his music.

"Every time I'm on stage, I strive to recreate what people remember and respect about what Elvis offered in his performance. He was a phenomenal singer, entertainer, and human being. He showed humility and remained humble throughout his life. That's what I want people to remember or catch a glimpse of. It wasn't about what he wore. It was about the music, his voice, and, most of all, he was REAL." - Brandon Bennett

# 2023 PRAM Prism Awards Banquet

## Welcome

Matt Martin, APR • PRAM State President

## Recognizing New APRs from 2022

Matt Westerfield, APR • VP Accreditation

## Announcement of Awards

Brandon Bennett • Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist

## 2022 Professional Achievement Award

### 2022 PRAM PRism Awards

Winners in Tiers 1, 2, and 3

### 2022 Best of Tier Winners

### 2022 Best of Show Winner

Note to all PAA, PRism and Best of winners:  
Please remain following the ceremony for group  
pictures with your awards.



# New PRAM APRs Since Last Conference

Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) is a two-part voluntary credential program for communications professionals. It is designed to demonstrate knowledge of the critical advanced PR and communications skills that deliver value in organizations large and small. APR is a true measure of excellence in the communications profession.



The APR credential demonstrates professional competence, excellence in the practice of public relations and communications, and a commitment to ethical practices. APR, the essential PR credential, administered by the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB), is the key to a next-level personal PR strategy demonstrating proficiency in the industry. Attaining the APR can define and catapult your professional brand and practice.

Each year, PRAM recognizes practitioners who have earned their APR, joining a cohort of leading professionals.

## Matt Martin, APR

Owner and Creative Director,  
Mighty Penguin Design





# 2023 Professional Achievement Award

The Professional Achievement Award (PAA) is PRAM's top honor and recognizes excellence in the field of public relations. It is presented annually to a member whose accomplishments have made a significant contribution to the field of public relations. Recipients embody the highest degree of professionalism, serve their communities, are committed to advancing the profession, and have outstanding achievements in the practice of public relations.

Each PRAM chapter is responsible for nominating one member who exemplifies professional achievement in the public relations field. The nominee must have 10 or more years of public relations experience.

A panel of public relations practitioners evaluate the nominations and make a selection based on the nominee's career achievement, professional service, community service, and continuing education. Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) is not required, but the APR designation, with appropriate supporting documentation, earns bonus points toward the final score.

## PREVIOUS HONOREES

*\* Denotes PAA recipients who have also received the Professional Achievement Award from the Southern Public Relations Federation.*

2022: Matt Martin, APR\* • Pine Belt  
2021: Tracy Yanez, APR\* • Mississippi Beach  
2020: Christen Duhé, APR • Mississippi Beach  
2019: Checky Herrington, APR, PRSA Fellow\* • Starkville/MSU  
2018: Christian Patterson, APR+M\* • Central  
2017: April Lollar, APR • Mississippi Beach  
2016: Samantha McCain, APR • Pine Belt  
2015: Mara Hartmann, APR • Central  
2014: Robin Street, APR\* • Oxford/Ole Miss  
2013: Mary Cracchiolo Spain, APR\* • Mississippi Beach  
2012: Lea Ivey Stone, APR\* • Mississippi Beach  
2011: Susan Christensen, APR • Central  
2010: Ron Barnes, APR • Mississippi Beach  
2009: Kristie Aylett, APR\* • Mississippi Beach & Gulf Coast  
2008: Kurt Brautigam, APR • Mississippi Beach  
2007: Caron Blanton, APR • Central  
2006: Richard Paul Maxwell • Mississippi Beach  
2005: Carl Crawford, APR • Central  
2004: Terry Hines-Smith • Mississippi Beach  
2003: Shelia White • Mississippi Beach  
2002: Myron Webb • Mississippi Beach  
2001: Sheila Skipper, APR • Central  
2000: Yvonne Sorge, APR • Central  
1999: Dr. John E. Forde, APR, Fellow PRSA\* • MSU/Starkville  
1998: Dr. Deiedre McGowan, APR, CAE\* • Central  
1996: Janice Gough Baddley • Central  
1995: Danny Gardner • MSU/Starkville  
1992: Philip Shirley, APR\* • Central

# 2023 Professional Achievement Award Nominee

## Corie Jones

Deputy Director and Public Relations Director, Volunteer Mississippi | The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service



Corie is an award-winning communicator and public relations professional with over 22 years of successful experience in communication, public relations, and marketing. After graduating from Mississippi State University with a B.A. in communication with an emphasis in public relations, Corie began her career at the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, leading statewide communication campaigns such as Buckle for Life, Students Against Destructive Decisions, and Click It or Ticket. In recent years, Corie worked as Marketing Director at the Mississippi Department of Education, leading statewide communication campaigns including TEACH MS, Strong Readers Strong Leaders, and Mississippi Connects.

As a young girl, Corie began volunteering at The Center that Loves, a food and clothing pantry that her grandparents founded in Amory, Miss. From that moment forward, she was dedicated to helping and loving people. Corie has extensive volunteer and work experience with non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations. Ultimately, Corie believes that all her experience has prepared her for her current role as Deputy Director and Public Relations Director at Volunteer Mississippi.

Corie is a member of Southern Public Relations Federation (SPRF) and Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) and currently serves as Vice President of Membership for the PRAM Central Chapter. Corie has earned 27 state and regional communication awards from PRAM and SPRF for strategic communication, crisis communication, writing, media relations, social media, web development, publications, video production, and graphic design. Most recently, Corie was named the 2022 Advanced Practitioner of the Year for PRAM Central Chapter.

Corie has been married to the man of her dreams for 21 years and loves her children, Lucy and Jack, more than all the rainbows. They like to go on adventures together, including their Chewie Dog and Ollie Cat. "Have we done good in the world today?" is the family motto. Corie's vision, mission, and life goal is to live by faith, be known by love, and give to those in need.

# 2023 Professional Achievement Award Nominee

## Christie Jones Lawrence

President, Surge Advisors



Christie Jones Lawrence, MS, MRHF, has more than 30 years of experience in marketing, public relations, strategic planning, proposal writing, training, fundraising, and business development in both the healthcare and nonprofit sectors, and she currently serves as president for Surge Advisors, an award-winning consulting and training firm. She is an educator, teaching public speaking at Mississippi State University and John Maxwell leadership courses to organizations as a certified Maxwell Leadership Team member. She also enjoys speaking at national and regional conferences on a wide variety of topics. Having run a \$1.2 million nonprofit with her husband for 10 years that was founded by Dr. Phil McGraw, she knows the challenges of managing staff and volunteers, fundraising, and promotion on a shoestring budget. Her mission is to accelerate the vision of organizations and individuals by using her expertise and tools.

She has served on numerous boards of directors, including the Mississippi University for Women Alumni Association (MUWAA) and the Executive Healthcare Network of Dallas-Fort Worth - the largest healthcare networking group in North Texas.

She received her Master of Science in public relations from University of Southern Mississippi and her Bachelor of Science in education from Mississippi University for Women. In 2019, she was part of the Mississippi Rural Health Fellow program.

She is married to Andy Lawrence and has one daughter and two amazing grandchildren. She loves gardening, photography, travel, golf, and horseback riding.



# Breakfast

Tuesday, April 4 • 9:00 to 10:15 a.m.  
Sweetgum Room

## Industry Networking

**Connect and Share with  
Practitioners in Your Field**



Shake up your own PR practices with ideas and strategies from your peers! This networking breakfast will provide an opportunity for you to meet others working in your industry across the state and share the joys and the struggles you face working in PR and communications within that industry.

Take this opportunity to talk about how Covid changed communications at your company, what challenges you face with your workforce, how new technology has made communicating easier (and harder!), and what social media platforms are getting you the most ROI.

Just look for the table with the label that most accurately describes your industry. Don't see one? Pick a seat and see what you can learn!

Students are invited to network with other students or to join the discussion at the table for the industry that interests you most.



# Notes



# Breakout

Tuesday, April 4 • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Oak Room

## Corie Jones

Deputy Director and Public  
Relations Director, Volunteer  
Mississippi | The Mississippi  
Commission for Volunteer Service



### Volunteering Is Good PR

Volunteers are writing the story of Mississippi's future today. We encourage you to put your talents, hobbies, and skills to work in your own community. We can rise to meet our state's challenges—not as isolated individuals, but as committed neighbors building a better, brighter future for all Mississippians.

At Volunteer Mississippi, we care about YOU and want to engage and support ALL Mississippians in service to their communities. Help us connect volunteers with opportunities all over Mississippi so YOU can make a real change in someone's life! Let's connect today!

### Bio

Corie is an award-winning communicator and public relations professional with over 22 years of successful experience in communication, public relations, and marketing. She recently accepted the 2022 Advanced Practitioner award for the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) Central Chapter. After graduating from Mississippi State University with a B.A. in communication with an emphasis in public relations, Corie began her career at the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, leading statewide communication campaigns such as Buckle for Life, Students Against Destructive Decisions, and Click It or Ticket. In recent years, Corie worked as Marketing Director at the Mississippi Department of Education, leading statewide communication campaigns including TEACH MS, Strong Readers Strong Leaders, and Mississippi Connects.

As a young girl, Corie began volunteering at The Center that Loves, a food and clothing pantry for families in need that her grandparents founded in Amory, Miss. From that moment forward, she was dedicated to helping and loving people. Corie has extensive volunteer and work experience with nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations. Ultimately, Corie believes that all her experience has prepared her for her new role as Deputy Director and Public Relations Director at Volunteer Mississippi, the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service. Corie currently serves as Vice President of Membership for PRAM Central Chapter.

# Notes



# Breakout

Tuesday, April 4 • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Magnolia Room

## Melody Fisher, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Public  
Relations, Mississippi State  
University



### Blurred Lines: Public Relations Ethics

This interactive presentation will take a case study approach to address public relations ethical dilemmas. Attendees will learn best practices to maintain the integrity of the public relations profession and become a responsible advocate for your organization and clients.

#### Bio

Melody T. Fisher, Ph.D. joined the Mississippi State University faculty in 2014 as an Assistant Professor of Public Relations. Before joining MSU, she was Assistant Professor and Chair of Mass Communication at Tougaloo College.

Dr. Fisher received her Bachelor's degree from Tougaloo College and both Masters and doctoral degrees in Public Relations and Mass Communication from the University of Southern Mississippi. Before graduating, she interned with the Senate communications and appropriations staff of the Illinois State Legislature.

Throughout her career in higher education, she has made several presentations at national conferences and published journal articles and book chapters on public relations in religious communities, crisis communication, and media portrayals of minority groups. Currently, she is an Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator in the Department of Communication. She recently published the book, *The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations*.





# Notes



# Lunch

Tuesday, April 4 • 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
Pine/Maple/Cedar Rooms

## Ashley Elkins

President, Vitality South



### Just Jump Already!

You ALREADY have what it takes to get to the next level. Whether that means a promotion, going back to school, or even starting your own business. Identify your tools and learn to wield them!

### Bio

Ashley is the President and Founder of a Marketing and Technology Agency, Vitality South. She is an experienced marketer with 15 years in practice. She holds a Marketing degree from Mississippi University for Women and an MBA from Georgia State University with a concentration in Leadership & Development. She has run a marketing agency for the last ten years and believes the way to success is by helping others succeed.



# Notes



# Student Awards

Tuesday, April 4 • 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
Pine/Maple/Cedar Rooms

## PRAM's Student of the Year Award

is bestowed to one student annually who exemplifies the professionalism, goals and ideals of the public relations profession. The Student of the Year receives a \$1,000 scholarship presented by **C Spire**.

A second student is named the **Greg Raimondo Outstanding PR Student** and receives a \$500 Scholarship from PRAM and PRAM River City.

### Eligible students meet the following requirements:

- (a) must be an undergraduate at a Mississippi university or college that offers at least one course with the words "public relations" in the course title,
- (b) must be a full-time student,
- (c) must have completed at least one course with the words "public relations" in the title by the end of December of the year he or she is nominated, and
- (d) must be a public relations, communication, journalism or marketing communications major.

Each applicant's score is based on academic excellence and academic honors, along with public relations activities and experience; campus involvement plus community activities; and the articulation of future goals and a letter of recommendation from the student's nominating professor/instructor.

## 2023 NOMINEES

**Zoie Henson** • Mississippi State University

**Chloe Lane** • The University of Southern Mississippi

**Maryanna Morris** • Mississippi State University

**Alyssa Schiaffino** • The University of Southern Mississippi

**Spencer Smith** • Mississippi State University

**Cooper Welch** • Mississippi College

**Reagan Young** • Mississippi State University

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Thank you for supporting  
our students



# Previous Student of the Year Honorees

**2022**

**Student of the Year**

Flora Dedeaux • Mississippi State University

**Greg Raimondo Outstanding PR Student**

Laken Laird • Mississippi State University

**2021**

**Student of the Year**

Karie Pinnix • Mississippi State University

**Greg Raimondo Outstanding PR Student**

Abbie Kate Hancock • Mississippi State University

**2020**

**Student of the Year**

Marisa Laudadio • Mississippi State University

**Greg Raimondo Outstanding PR Student**

Karsyn King • University of Mississippi

**2019**

**Student of the Year**

Kali Hicks • Mississippi State University

**Greg Raimondo Outstanding PR Student**

Davis Roberts • University of Mississippi

**2018**

**Student of the Year**

Taylor White • Mississippi State University

**Outstanding PR Student**

Lauren Case • Mississippi State University

**2017**

**Student of the Year**

Rachel Anderson • The University of Mississippi

**2016**

**Student of the Year**

Kathryn Duke • University of Southern Mississippi

**Outstanding PR Student**

Tori Lynn Olker • University of Mississippi

**2015**

**Student of the Year**

Christine B. Bowman • Mississippi State University

**Outstanding PR Student**

Chelsea E. Dillard • Mississippi State University

**2014**

**Student of the Year**

Ashley Dillard • Mississippi College

**Outstanding PR Student**

Karelia Schmitz • University of Southern Mississippi

**2013**

No awards conferred

**2012**

**Student of the Year**

Kristie Warino • University of Mississippi

**Outstanding PR Student**

Foster Page • Mississippi State University

**2011**

**Student of the Year**

Elizabeth Fine • Mississippi State University

**Outstanding PR Student**

Erin Parsons • University of Mississippi

**2010**

**Student of the Year**

Kayla Bradley • Mississippi State University

**Outstanding PR Student**

Jennifer Puhr • Mississippi State University

Prior to 2010, PRAM awarded a scholarship to a deserving student nominated by a professor.

# Notes



# Notes



**Values are like fingerprints. Nobody's are the same, but you leave 'em all over everything you do.**

**- Elvis Presley**

## The King Sponsors



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## Blue Suede Sponsors

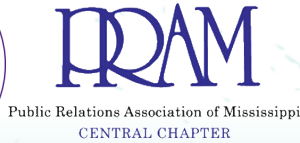


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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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