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Russ Barley Receives SAF's Paul Ecke, Jr. Award



ALEXANDRIA, VA – AUGUST 20, 2026 – For more than four decades, Russ Barley, AAF, AIFD, CFD, FSMD, has mentored floral professionals, led industry organizations and built a successful floral business, while serving his hometown of Freeport, Florida. For his extraordinary devotion to the floral profession, industry and community, Barley is the 2026 recipient of the Society of American Florists' Paul Ecke, Jr. Award.

The award recognizes exemplary devotion to the floral profession, industry and community. Barley received the honor Aug. 20 at the Stars of the Industry Awards Ceremony, held during SAF's 141st annual convention in Amelia Island, Florida.

About Russ:

A Freeport native and U.S. Navy veteran, Barley returned home in 1990 to open Emerald Coast Flowers & Gifts. He went on to lead the Florida State Florists' Association as president and executive secretary. His industry honors include FSFA Designer of the Year and induction into the association's Hall of Fame.

In 1992, Barley founded the Emerald Coast Florist Association to connect and educate floral professionals across Northwest Florida. More than three decades later, the organization remains active. His service extends to his hometown, where he was elected mayor of Freeport in 2013 and now serves his third term.

"It's rare to find the same person devoted to industry organizations at that level and also rise to serve as mayor of his city while running a successful business," says SAF Awards Committee member Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, president of Penny's by Plaza Flowers. "Russ dedicated himself not only to his craft but to the community around him in ways that makes you wonder how he found the time to do it all — and do it so well."

[Event photos are available here.](#)

About The Society of American Florists

The Society of American Florists is the association that connects and cultivates a thriving floral community through training, education, marketing resources and advocacy. Our vision: The power of flowers in every life. For more information, visit safnow.org.