



# Meet the judges

## 2026 Florida program

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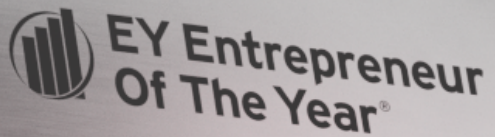


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Entrepreneur Of The Year® (EOY) recognizes the most ambitious leaders who are building and sustaining successful, dynamic businesses around the world.

EOY Award winners comprise a global network of visionaries, each on a transformational journey to create, innovate, grow, learn and build a better world.

### About the judging panel

The success of the program relies on the efforts of our independent panel of judges. The panel comprises past EOY Award recipients and civic and community leaders who devote significant effort to review and deliberate the merits of each nominee. We deeply appreciate their dedication to the program.

Click on the judges to learn more about them.

### Meet the judges

The judges evaluate nominees on a variety of criteria, including, but not limited to:  
Entrepreneurial spirit | Purpose | Growth | Impact | Financial performance



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## Dr. Susan Amat

Director, Miami Herbert Business School

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Dr. Amat is the CEO and founder of Venture Hive, a software and training company that provides accountability and transparency tools and content to support innovation management and entrepreneurship programs. A serial entrepreneur, she built businesses in the entertainment industry for over a decade, including the first CD-ROM magazine and a national television show. After completing her MBA, Dr. Amat developed pediatric health monitoring products and earned a PhD in Strategic Entrepreneurship (coursework in industrial engineering, business and education). While teaching at the University of Miami, she founded The Launch Pad, which was considered the top model in entrepreneurship education. Her program and platform were replicated throughout the world as Blackstone LaunchPads in universities including USC, UCLA and Case Western Reserve University. Venture Hive has run internal and external innovation programs in Fortune 100 companies, accelerators and universities with innovators and entrepreneurs from more than 60 different countries and has developed and runs Entrepreneurship World Cup – the largest global competition for startups and scaleups with more than 600,000 applicants over six years. Dr. Amat served as the founding Chair of the STEM Board for Miami-Dade County Public Schools and actively speaks about entrepreneurship education internationally. She has worked with the U.S. Department of State, the Kauffman Foundation and the World Bank on program development, measurement and evaluation. In 2012, Dr. Amat was honored as a Champion of Change at the White House.



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## John Beacham

CEO, Toorak Capital Partners LLC

*Entrepreneur Of The Year 2022 Regional winner*

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John Beacham is the CEO and founder of Toorak Capital Partners and winner of the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year award. He is an experienced entrepreneur, who has completed more than \$60 billion in transactions over his 25-year career and has structured CMBS or financings that were honored with multiple “Deal of the Year” awards.

John pioneered capital market acceptance of residential bridge loans and single-family rental loans; asset classes that historically had no institutional funding base. Toorak has funded in excess of \$13 billion in loans by partnering with business-purpose residential mortgage lenders across the US and UK who originate loans based on its proprietary credit guidelines.

Prior to Toorak, Mr. Beacham was the founder and president of B2R Finance, the leading mortgage origination company focused on the single-family rental and residential bridge-loan markets. B2R Finance (now Finance of America Commercial) was a Blackstone portfolio company.

Before founding B2R, Mr. Beacham originated large-balance commercial real estate loans in the CMBS group at Deutsche Bank and worked in the financial institutions investment banking groups at Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse First Boston.

John or companies founded by him have won numerous awards, including American Association of Private Lenders Member of the Year (twice), NJBIZ Executive of the Year, NJBIZ Fastest Growing Company in NJ (twice), Bridging & Commercial Bridging Funding Partner of the Year (twice), and HousingWire Vanguard.

Mr. Beacham graduated from Princeton University magna cum laude with an AB degree in Economics.



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## Michael Cassidy

Partner, August Spark

*Entrepreneur Of The Year 2011 Regional winner*

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Michael Cassidy is an entrepreneur who has started and exited multiple companies. He founded and served as Undertone CEO for 14 years (acquired in 2015 by Perion (NASDAQ: PERI)). He created a family office (August Spark) to make private investments, including purchasing BVA, the largest Shopify Plus agency in the US (acquired by Accenture (NYSE: ACN) in 2022). Michael was an EOY Award recipient in 2011 and subsequent judge for the competition. He has been a YPO member since 2008.



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## Michael Connolly

CEO, Sonobi

*Entrepreneur Of The Year 2018 Regional winner*

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Michael Connolly, CEO of Sonobi, co-founded the company in 2012 to deliver his vision for the future of AdTech. Today, Sonobi is the leading technology provider of people-based marketing solutions, which enable media transactions against individuals in ways that are relevant, predictable and measurable. A serial entrepreneur, Michael's first venture was an online web applications company that attracted over 30 million unique visitors and 1.5 billion ad impressions per month by the time it was acquired in 2012. This success followed him to Sonobi, a company that services clients in North America, EMEA and Australia.

Though ultimately product-driven, Michael nonetheless has deep operational experience and the rare ability to master details without ever losing sight of the big picture. This has enabled him to create an overarching framework for his company that is forward-thinking, innovative, fiscally responsible and technologically sound.

Michael has spent many years learning to lead gracefully under pressure and his leadership skills are battle-hardened. He was an Army officer and military aviator, who served as a Battle Captain in the Army during the Iraq War. As a UH-60 helicopter pilot, he has flown multiple missions throughout central Iraq. These experiences, combined with his background as an entrepreneur, have been instrumental in developing his leadership philosophy, which is rooted in integrity, accountability and adaptability.

A 2018 winner for Ernst and Young's prestigious EOY Award, Michael has also been recognized as one of Florida's most successful young executives under 40 by the Orlando Business Journal. While in service, he was awarded the Air Medal for meritorious service in combat. He holds a Master of Business Administration from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



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## Libby Covington

Managing Director, NASDAQ

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Libby Covington joined Nasdaq in 2025 after over 30 years of experience in professional services and capital markets. She has spent most of her career building and implementing strategies that help companies grow and access capital. She has worked in business development roles in investment banking, legal, private equity and accounting and consulting firms. Her background includes leadership roles at The CapStreet Group, a private equity firm; Simmons & Company, an investment bank; KPMG and Fulbright & Jaworski.

Libby has a Bachelor of Business Administration from Loyola University, New Orleans. When not working, she enjoys reading, tennis and spending time with her husband and two college-aged sons.



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## Josh Fisher

CEO, District Partners LLC

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Josh Fisher, a native of the Washington, DC area, relocated to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 2021 with his wife, Stacey. In early 2020, he launched District Partners, an executive search and consulting firm specializing in talent solutions. District Partners focuses on working with C-suite executives, guiding them through strategic hiring decisions to fuel their companies' growth. The firm connects elite accounting, finance and technology professionals with pivotal roles in rapidly expanding organizations. In 2023, District Partners was recognized as the No. 1 fastest-growing company in Washington, DC, on the Inc. 5000 list.

Before founding District Partners, Josh served as Executive Vice President at Addison Group, where he spent nearly 15 years in recruitment and headhunting. He played a key role in scaling the firm from 40 employees to more than 2,000, driving nearly a billion dollars in revenue before its successful exit to private equity. Earlier in his career, Josh honed his finance skills at a top international asset management firm but soon realized his passion extended beyond spreadsheets and financials. This experience laid the foundation for his journey, reinforcing his commitment to finance while inspiring him to approach it from a different perspective.

On a personal note, Josh and Stacey have two beautiful children. They are avid travelers, enjoy skiing, biking and playing tennis, often seeking out remote destinations for their next adventures. Professionally, he is committed to investing in early-stage companies, leveraging his knowledge to help them scale and achieve sustainable growth.



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## Ken LaRoe

Founder, CEO and Chairman, Climate First Bank

*Entrepreneur Of The Year 2024 Regional winner*

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Ken LaRoe came out of retirement to establish Climate First Bank in 2021. After successfully launching two banks in South Florida, LaRoe returned to the industry because of his conviction there was more he could do to fight climate change. He raised over \$44 million in just one year to establish Climate First Bank. LaRoe brought the Bank to market in the turbulent economy of the pandemic but was propelled to launch by the knowledge that time was not on the side of climate change. He believed the best thing he could do for the community and the world was to launch the Bank as soon as possible, even if it was a great risk for himself, personally and professionally. Since this launch, the Bank has continually expanded its physical and digital banking offerings. While still in de novo status, LaRoe has led the development of digital services that are used by customers in 49 states. All Climate First Bank customers can access specialized programs such as the nation's simplest solar lending platform as well as LGBTQ+-affirming pride banking, in addition to traditional banking rates competitive with the nation's largest banks. In early 2023, the Bank exceeded \$500 million in assets, making it one of the fastest growing banks in the United States. Climate First Bank is the nation's first FDIC-insured, full-service, community bank founded to combat the climate crisis. While traditional banking often invests customers' assets in financing fossil fuels, Climate First Bank's customer deposits fund solar loans for consumers and businesses. The bank provides a deeply necessary alternative to the industry standard of banking, allowing consumers to have a say in what their hard-earned money is funding. Climate First Bank's offerings and services enable customers to easily live out an environmentally ethical lifestyle. The Bank is a Certified B Corp and member of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV).



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## Eric Reimer

CEO and Co-Chairman, Healthmap Solutions

*2024 US National winner*

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Eric Reimer is the CEO and Co-Chairman of the Board at Healthmap Solutions and also serves as a director of Imagine360 and CardioOne. Eric has over 30 years of healthcare services experience and leadership, focused on growing payer service and provider companies. In 2024, Eric was recognized as the Entrepreneur Of The Year US National Health and Life Sciences award winner by Ernst & Young LLP (EY US).

Prior to joining Healthmap, Eric was an operating partner at private equity firm Water Street, served as Chairman of Unified Women's Care, OBHospitalist Group and ELAP Services, and held various executive leadership roles at Magellan Health Services. As the former Chief Executive Officer of CareCentrix, the leader in home health benefits management, Eric broadened the management team and introduced innovative product offerings leading to a tripling of company revenues. Previously at Magellan Health Services, he led the Health Plan West Behavioral division serving 15 Blues plans; was Chief Growth Officer responsible for sales, strategy and acquisitions; and was Chief Executive Officer of National Imaging Associates (NIA), where he led the division through 800% revenue growth over two years.

Eric received his bachelor's degree from Washington University and a master's in Business Administration from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

## Entrepreneur Of The Year Florida team

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### About Entrepreneur Of The Year®

Entrepreneur Of The Year® is the world's most prestigious business awards program for unstoppable entrepreneurs. These visionary leaders deliver innovation, growth and prosperity that transform our world. The program engages entrepreneurs with insights and experiences that foster growth. It connects them with their peers to strengthen entrepreneurship around the world. Entrepreneur Of The Year is the first and only truly global awards program of its kind. It celebrates entrepreneurs through regional and national awards programs in more than 145 cities in over 60 countries. Winners go on to compete for the World Entrepreneur Of The Year® title. [ey.com/us/eoy](https://ey.com/us/eoy)

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