



Meet the judges

2025 Southeast program

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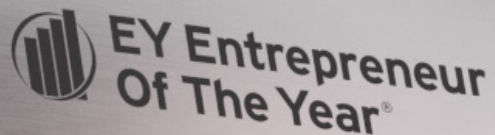
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Entrepreneur Of The Year recognizes the most ambitious leaders who are building and sustaining successful, dynamic businesses around the world.

Entrepreneur Of The Year 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 Entrepreneur Of The Year 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



Ginger Aydogdu

CEO and Founder, Simply Southern Holdings LLC

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2022 Southeast winner

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Ginger Aydogdu is the founder and CEO of Simply Southern Holdings, LLC. From the age of 14, Ginger began her career in the retail sector of business. Working in retail, learning how a business worked and fashion became a passion. After several years working in corporate America, Ginger decided that it was time to try and take her passion and start a business, so she created Simply Southern.

Ginger believes “if you love what you do, it never seems like work.” As of 2023, Simply Southern has been ranked the top T-shirt brand by GiftBeat for six years straight. Aydogdu and Simply Southern are passionate about helping those who are less fortunate and using their success for good. They donate to a variety of organizations but are best known for their efforts to help sea turtle conservation and ChildFund International. Ginger was recognized as a regional winner for the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year 2022 Southeast Region.



Michael Burcham

Chief of Strategy & Talent Development, Shore Capital Partners

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Michael began his career at Hospital Corporation of America after graduating from the University of Mississippi Medical Center in 1983. He holds an MBA from Belmont University and a doctorate in Health Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina.

An entrepreneur, investor and investment strategist, Michael has led three investor-backed firms to successful exits and invests in multiple early-stage companies. He is a professor for the Practice of Management at Vanderbilt's Owen Graduate School of Management and faculty director of Vanderbilt's Center for Entrepreneurship. Additionally, he serves as Chief of Strategy and Talent Development for Shore Capital Partners, leading strategic planning and talent development across the portfolio, and directs Shore University.

Previously, Michael founded and served as CEO of Narus Health, a healthcare concierge organization that became part of Lucent Health in 2019. He was also the founding President and CEO of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center from 2010 to 2015 and Co-Chair of the National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship for the U.S. Secretary of Commerce from 2014 to 2016.

Michael has been honored as Nashvillian of the Year (2014) and Tennessean of the Year (2015). He chaired the National Advisory Council on Innovation & Entrepreneurship for President Obama from 2013 to 2016.

From 2000 to 2007, Michael was President of ParadigmHealth, now part of Optum Health, and from 1993 to 2000, he was President and Founder of Theraphysics, a venture-backed specialty rehabilitation firm. Michael's contribution to entrepreneurship is at the heart of everything he does.



Gary Cooper

Executive Chairman, Palmetto Infusion Services

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2020 Southeast winner

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Gary Cooper is the co-founder and Executive Chairman of Palmetto Infusion. Gary graduated from Wofford College with a BS in Economics and went on to acquire his Master of Health Care Administration from the University of South Carolina. He has dedicated more than 25 years of service and leadership to the health care industry as an entrepreneur across a number of different businesses. Gary's commitment to the industry and servant leadership has ensured that the employees, patients and communities served by his companies have benefited from his stewardship. Gary's business philosophy has created the foundation for the success of Palmetto Infusion, which was further enhanced with its partner, Carousel Capital. The partnership has brought sophisticated human and financial capital to the table, creating an ideal combination of resources for employees, patients and the company. Gary was blessed to have learned his business philosophy from his late father, Charles F. Cooper, who had an indelible impact on his family and his community. Following in his father's footsteps, serving others has been, and continues to be, the cornerstone of Gary's personal and professional life. Gary and his wife Kelly reside in Pawleys Island, SC and are the parents of four beautiful children Gracyn, Clemons, Marshall and Sutton.



Todd Latz

CEO, GoHealth Urgent Care

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2023 Southeast winner

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Todd Latz has been the CEO of GoHealth Urgent Care for the past nine years. Together with his team, he has grown the company from seven to over 395 on-demand care centers across 16 states through a unique, partnership-oriented model with 12 nationally recognized health systems. Todd and his team have created a digitally enabled, omnichannel, on-demand offering that includes Direct-To-Employer, Transitional Primary Care, Behavioral Health, and Value-Based Care services.

Prior to joining GoHealth Urgent Care, Todd was the CEO of MedQuest, Inc., a leading owner, operator, and manager of diagnostic imaging facilities, with over 75 centers in 8 states and multiple health system joint ventures. Under Todd's leadership, MedQuest also provided management and billing services to integrated health systems, physician practices, and ambulatory surgery centers. Over the past 15 years, Todd has led over 40 acquisitions, divestitures, joint ventures and other strategic transactions.

Before joining MedQuest, Todd practiced law at King & Spalding LLP in Atlanta, Georgia, where he focused on public and private company securities matters, mergers and acquisitions, corporate governance, and capital raising transactions. Todd graduated *summa cum laude* from Duke University and was awarded a post-graduate Fulbright Scholarship, during which he was affiliated with the Universität Leipzig in Germany. He received his JD from the University of Virginia School of Law and was a member of the Virginia Law Review and Order of the Coif.



Sonya Locke

CEO, EDS Service Solutions, LLC

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2023 Southeast winner

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Sonya Locke is the Chief Executive Officer of EDS Service Solutions, a leading provider of outsourced labor solutions. With 27+ years in human capital management, Sonya has driven EDS to become a national player with contracts across major car rental brands, hospitality leaders, automotive manufacturers, and logistics sectors. EDS operates in over 130 locations, including the top 30 US airports, with 7,000+ employees, setting a new standard for customized staffing solutions.

Sonya's career began in 1996, staffing the Atlanta Olympics. She later founded Stryden, a pioneer in transaction-based pricing for staffing and business process outsourcing. Adding to her entrepreneurial journey, Sonya also founded Workforce Velocity, a powerful all-inclusive workforce management software based in Dublin, Ireland. Workforce Velocity helps organizations optimize their workforce and improve operational efficiency. Sonya seamlessly blends human relations with data-driven strategic workforce management, enabling her to effectively manage operational processes by integrating human and technical elements for optimal outcomes. This is evident in her consulting for industry giants like Amazon, Audi, Hertz and Walmart.

Her leadership has consistently delivered exceptional results, even amidst challenges like recessions, competition and a global pandemic. This success is reflected in EDS being named an ACG Georgia Fast 40 Winner and ranked second for the Atlanta Pacesetter Award by the Atlanta Business Chronicle. EDS was also named on the Inc. 5000 list of Fastest Growing Companies in the US (2023, 2024)..

Sonya is passionate about empowering communities and fostering a culture of learning and excellence within EDS. Her resilience and commitment to employee growth have solidified her reputation as a transformative leader in the human capital management industry. She is an EY Entrepreneur of the Year 2023 Southeast Regional Winner.



Tad Nacheff

Head of Private Equity Sponsor Relationships – Capital Markets, New York Stock Exchange

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Tad Nacheff is Head of PE Sponsor Relationships in Capital Markets at the New York Stock Exchange, working with PE Firms and their portfolio companies that are interested in tapping public markets. He has been at the NYSE for four years and his previous role was New York Regional Head of Capital Markets. Prior to joining the NYSE, Nacheff had a 30-year career in Institutional Sales mainly at Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers. In that role, Nacheff was responsible for large NYC accounts like Alliance Bernstein and Neuberger Berman along with sovereign wealth funds including GIC and Norges Bank. Much of institutional sales involved the sale and placement of initial public offerings. Nacheff holds an MBA from the NYU Stern School of Business and BBA in Finance from the University of Notre Dame.



Christa Pitts

Co-Founder and Co-CEO, The Lumistella Company

Entrepreneur Of The Year 2023 Southeast winner

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Imagine being applauded for “revolutionizing the essence of Christmas.” That is precisely what American businesswoman and entrepreneur Christa Pitts is celebrated for.

Christa serves as the co-CEO and co-founder of The Lumistella Company, a dynamic enterprise behind the enchanting brand, The Elf on the Shelf. Under her strategic leadership, more than 28 million The Elf on the Shelf brand Scout Elves, Elf Pets, and Elf Mates have been adopted in 26 countries across five continents, solidifying a massive global reach.

Considered a scion in branding, Christa began her journey as a QVC Program Host, amassing 2,000 hours of live, unscripted television experience. During this time, she honed her expertise in understanding the mechanics of sales, the intricacies of advertising, and the significance of brand authenticity.

This wealth of knowledge proved invaluable when she joined forces with her mother and twin sister to share their cherished family Christmas tradition with the world.

Highly regarded for her business acumen, Christa is a sought-after keynote speaker and TV media personality. She is frequently requested to share her perspective on diverse subjects, from being a woman in business to supply chain-related issues on mediums including MSNBC and CBS.

Over the years, she has been featured hundreds of times on prominent platforms and stages, including the TODAY Show, Forbes, and The Wall Street Journal. Recognizing the power of her work, Entrepreneur Magazine has named The Lumistella Company “A Christmastime IP Giant.”

A symbol of empowerment for women in business, Christa’s voice resonates with many. Most recently, she was named the Entrepreneur Of The Year 2023 Southeast regional winner. Christa embodies the spirit of breaking barriers and redefining what it means to lead with passion, resilience and unwavering dedication.

Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast team

Chevy Arnold | Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast Program Director

Kimberly Kicklighter | Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast Program Director

Ryan Emerson | Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast Program Manager

Alexis Levy | Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast Program Coordinator

Jhez Ferriol | Entrepreneur Of The Year Southeast Program Coordinator

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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

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