

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2022 ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR!



Entrepreneurs play a key role in any economy, using the skills and initiative necessary to anticipate needs and bring good new ideas to market. The individuals who have the drive and determination to step out on their own and turn their ideas into reality. Entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of our communities and our economy. They are deal makers, change makers, dream makers. They challenge the status quo, inject competition into markets, and spur innovation. They change the ways in which we live, work, and play. That is why we celebrate them today – because they are our future. Some Entrepreneurs may think, how can I make money? But the better question is how can I make people's lives better; if you get that right, success will follow. The Entrepreneur Awards

celebrates those who got it right by making people's lives better. Together, this year's nominated entrepreneurs represent **11** different communities and **24** different zip codes in North Alabama. **51** are women, **19** are men. They represent outside investment dollars from Venture Capital, Private Equity, Bank Loans, Corporate Capital, Grants, Foundation Funding, and Angel Investment. Most impressively, jointly they provide jobs for **731** employees, and in 2021 alone, they account for over **\$103 million** dollars in economic development across North Alabama.



THE Entrepreneur of the Year is awarded to an individual who has been in business for over three years and has a proven track record of This sustainability, strategic direction, future growth, and community involvement. Congratulations to Dave Bristol, President & CEO of

Acquisition Integrations, LLC. This entrepreneur's journey began as an Army Aviator and Acquisition professional with a focus in program management and contracting over a period of 27 years. Through his Army career, he recognized the need for, and challenges associated with operational readiness of aviation and ground systems. He founded his SBA certified HUBZone and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) 7 years ago. Leveraging from his operational aviation and acquisition Army career, he understands the importance of building a professional team, planning, managing resources, program execution, reporting, and effective communication. During his journey over the past seven years, he quickly recognized the importance of strongly established relationships throughout the DoD and across specific industry sectors. He continues to give back to the community both personally and professionally. He believes by investing in these community resources, they are reinforcing their commitment to a service-minded, strong work ethic and setting an example of teamwork and self-sacrifice to strengthen the fabric of our community and our business.



Words often used to describe a Champion are supporter, superstar, coach, encourager, inspirer, and of course legend. These words are all words we would use to describe our The Joanne Randolph Entrepreneur Champion of the Year, Mayor of the City of Madison Paul Finley. An entrepreneur and small business owner himself, Mayor Finley understands the challenges that face small businesses today. The City of Madison was ranked #1 in Best Places to Live in Alabama by [niche.com](https://www.niche.com). People flock here from all over to enjoy the quality of life in Madison. With exponential growth comes responsibility of the city to manage infrastructure and other demands. We appreciate all Mayor Finley does to support this growth, small businesses and to keep Madison's quality of life a priority.



The Youth Entrepreneur of the Year is awarded to a school-aged entrepreneur in K-12 who has started their entrepreneurial journey and business at a young age and is working toward their dream. Our Youth Entrepreneur of the Year is Belle Buerhle. Her journey began through the MadisonCEO program during her senior year of high school. As a figure skater of 10 years, she saw that the snack market was lacking for healthy, tasty options. She realized that her friends were going crazy for her protein snacks, and she turned it into her business. She has sold at area farmers markets, as well as local gyms. She plans to continue her journey by pursuing entrepreneurial studies at UAB.



The Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year award is given to an entrepreneur who has been in business for one to three years and has a proven track record for sustainability and growth. In one of our deepest and most talented Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year groups yet, our winner is Bailey Erickson, Wafel-Bitte, LLC. Bailey started her business with her daughter during COVID, and she has used it as a way to show her daughter how to take a great idea and turn it into a business. They wanted to make something that would make people happy. So, they experimented with different recipes, until they came up with a taste authentic to a true Belgian waffle. They grew their business by selling at markets and catering to individuals and businesses with the mission of making the world happier one waffle at a time.



The Creative Entrepreneur of the Year is given to a nontechnical entrepreneur whose focus is on the retail, arts, entertainment, or culinary industry who has a proven track record for sustainability. The 2022 recipient of the Creative Entrepreneur of the Year Maria Troupe of Wine & Design started with a desire to fill a need for entertainment options in Madison. She chose to capitalize on the growth in the area when selecting her location. She encountered challenges during the renovation phase, and she cut costs to ensure she would be able to operate her business once it was open. She has focused on offering a variety of services and strives to continually be in the know on the latest trends in crafting, and she helps boost other entrepreneurs by collaborating with other small businesses each month.



This year we introduced a new award, the Government Contracting Entrepreneur of the Year to recognize the large role that government contracting entrepreneurs play in our economic ecosystem. Our Government Contracting Entrepreneur of the Year, Sandra Cepeda, started her own company in 2001. She had previously worked in Engineering and management serving the Department of Defense, and she utilized this knowledge to start her company providing engineering support to the Army's Software Engineering Directorate. Sandra has steadily expanded her company to meet customer needs, and she continues to strive to meet God's will. She believes in true servant leadership, encouraging others to live their lives to the best of their abilities, and serving the community.



Although nonprofits receive revenue differently from for-profits, the leaders must still possess an entrepreneurial spirit to maintain and grow their nonprofit organization. This year's Nonprofit Entrepreneur of the year Lee Marshall, of Kids to Love, truly began her journey when she was adopted into foster care at the age of 2. Knowing firsthand the difference a forever family can make fuels her mission of meeting the immediate needs of children living in foster care. The center provides emergency assistance to foster families, houses school supplies and Christmas gifts, and supports around 13,000 people each year. She believes as a leader that it is important that everyone on her team knows that they have a seat at the table and a voice that will be heard.



The Veteran Entrepreneur of the Year is granted to an outstanding military veteran entrepreneur in the North Alabama Region. The recipient of this award, Buddy Lockwood of Artemis Shielding wanted to continue to make the world a better and safer place once his service to our Nation was complete. He does this by protecting people from the hazardous effects of lead and radiation. He strives to do what he commits to doing with a focus on listening to his customers. He continues to apply some of the same principals he learned as a leader in the military and considers one of his biggest helps along the way to be training the team to his left and right to do his job. He believes one of the best lessons is to always lead from the front – never to ask someone to do something for you that you are unwilling to do.



The People's Choice Award is decided by YOU... the community. This title is awarded to a local entrepreneur who applied for an award and received the most votes on AL.com. This year's recipient received over 1,800 votes or 23% of the vote. Our People's Choice winner this year Clark Crosson of Crosstek construction started his business in a garage but has since grown to 3 full time project managers with a corporate office. Approximately 80% of his business comes from referral and repeat clients. He has found that treating the customer with respect and honesty goes a long way in the construction industry and sets them apart from the rest. During these changing times, he has adopted a new strategy for the future, and that is to pause growth to provide the best possible customer service to their clients. He is now in his 7th year of business, and he continues to do his best to serve and give back to the community.



The Female Entrepreneur of the Year is awarded to an outstanding female entrepreneur in the North Alabama Region. The winner of this award will be submitted to the Small Business Administration's Small Business of the Year National Award by the Women's Business Center. This year's winner, Chef Adyre Mason, Owner and Executive Chef of The Veggie began her journey as an entrepreneur in 2017 after losing her mother and using her grief as a catalyst to reinvent herself through her business in her mother's honor. Doctors had revealed that a healthier, specifically plant-based, diet could have helped her mother's chronic issues and possibly prevented her strokes. This fuels her hope that she can help other people take an interest in eating better and perhaps prolonging their lives by providing relatable plant-based food that focuses on familiar Southern staples. When things have gotten tough, she has always turned back to her plan and worked to utilize and promote her strengths as well as their ingenuity to the local vegan community.

Thank you again to all our entrepreneurs for making North Alabama a wonderful and unique place to live. Thank you to our sponsors, and Congratulations to our 2022 Entrepreneur Award winners!

