

FLORIDA STATE CONVENTION 18 July 2026

Dann Matizza, Chapter 398 President

AFA Florida State Convention was held on Saturday, 18 July at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel in Jacksonville. It was hosted by the Falcon Chapter (Larry Belge, President).

Folks arriving on Friday were able to enjoy a no-host dinner at the Charthouse Restaurant about 2 blocks from the hotel. About 22 attendees and guests attended that event.

The convention itself kicked off the next morning and was led by AFA Florida State/Region President Mike Liquori. Mike welcomed everyone to the event and led us in the Pledge. Chaplain Kitchens gave the invocation for the event. State Secretary Sharon Branch conducted rollcall and reported Gold Coast, Tyndall and Miami Homestead Chapters absent. (Miami Homestead is closed but was still shown on the roster.) Special guests attending the meeting include Janelle Stafford (candidate for VCB FO and current National Director of Central Area) and Mark "Buster" Douglas (Candidate for National Director At Large and former National Director.)

Minutes from the Winter Meeting were approved by the delegates. The Financial Status of the State was presented by Treasurer Tom Carney. There was some discussion of items, but nothing controversial. The proposed budget for next year was approved later that afternoon.

State Officer Elections were held. Elected were: Mike Liquori State President; Gavin MacAloon State VP; Tom Carney State Treasurer; Taona Enriquez State Secretary. Terms start on 1 Oct 2026.

Other Discussion and Business topics discussed.

1. National Convention: Spouse Event (2 hour Potomac River Cruise on Sat); Election for Vice Chair of the Board for Field Operations: Chris Canada vs Janelle Stafford; Election for National Director at Large (5 candidates and 2 slots available): Bill Harding, Mark Douglas, Paul Weseloh, Taono Enriquez, or Todd Freece; Election for National Director East Area: (Linda McMahon – unopposed)
2. Florida is entitled to 55 delegates this year (virtual+ in-person.) Names of delegates due NLT 14 Aug. HARD DATE!!! Virtual delegates must register and pay \$20 Registration fee. Notify Mike Liquori ASAP if you plan to be a delegate!
3. Vote at National will also include new Membership options and fees. Mission Membership has increased AFA membership significantly, however, most of those are free memberships. Move is underway to redefine membership categories and associated benefits between Premium (Paid) members and Mission members. (Hurlburt Chapter membership has grown 62.3% in four months, from 1029 to 1670. When combined with Eglin membership, 25% of AFA members in Florida belong in this area!!!!)

4. New reporting requirement for the combined Activity and Financial semi-annual report. Due date extended to 12 Aug for this period. Still bugs in it.
5. Looking for candidates for Emerging Leaders for 2027.
6. Mike would like to have more nominations for National Level Awards. Wants to submit Florida as Outstanding State in 2027 but needs support from chapters.
7. Winter Meeting is planned for either 13 or 20 Feb 2027.
8. Next State Convention will be held in Tallahassee; host is Bud West Chapter. Mac MacAloon has volunteered the new Buckingham/Page Chapter 173 for 2028. (Chapter planned but not yet chartered. It is a morph of old Highlands and Sarasota to be based in Ft Myers)
9. AFA is reorganizing the Field. One issue, not every state has 2 chapters in it to justify a state organization. Another issue, Florida is the only Region with only one State. AFA currently has 14 Regions one of which is FLORIDA. New plan calls for Florida to become part of a new Southeast Region along with Georgia and South Carolina, with would create a region with 21 Chapters. North Carolina, currently in the Southeast Region, would join the Central East Region consisting of Delaware, Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, and West Virginia with a total of 18 Chapters. I don't have details on the other moves or plans. Probably happen in Jan timeframe.
10. We also had presentations on Advocacy and Field Operations (some highlights are above). Candidates for the upcoming national elections also spoke in person or via video for 5 minutes each to give their rationale and plans for the office.
11. At lunch, State awards were presented to the various winners. I accepted the Extra-Large Chapter of the Year Award and Exceptional Service Awards for Communications, Community Relations, Best Single Program, and Overall Programming for the Chapter. In addition, I accepted the Chapter Member of the year Award for Meredith Coleman, the Exceptional Service Award for Fred Gross, and the Sustained Service Award for Susan Ault-Davis.
12. At dinner that evening, Congressman John Rutherford (FL-05) served as the guest speaker. Following his address, State President Mike Liquori presented Ms. Jennifer Cook the State Teacher of the Year Award. He also announced that General Conly was selected as the Waterman Award winner and gave me his individual Award to bring back for his Award Ceremony in October.