

University of Florida Association of Military Alumni Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

University of Florida Association of Military Alumni Honors 2025 Military Gators of the Year

Gainesville, Fla. (Dec.1, 2025) – The University of Florida Association of Military Alumni recognized six military-affiliated alumni Nov. 21 for their contributions to the University of Florida and their communities during its 2025 annual awards banquet in Gainesville, Fla.

The 2025 award recipients are:

Service Member of the Year – Cmdr. James Walsh, U.S. Navy; Jacksonville, Fla.

Veteran of the Year – Gregory Weiss; Jupiter, Fla.

Reservist of the Year – Lt. Jamal Sowell, U.S. Navy Reserve; Orlando, Fla.

Family Member of the Year – Melissa Campbell; Jacksonville, Fla.

Dept. of War Civilian of the Year – David Koch; Albuquerque, N.M.

Lifetime Achievement Award – Lt. Jamal Sowell, U.S. Navy Reserve

In addition, William “Bill” Emerson was inducted into the University of Florida Association of Military Alumni Hall of Fame as the inaugural recipient of the award in recognition of his distinguished military service and significant contributions to the University of Florida. Jake Emerson, Emerson’s grandson, accepted the award on his late grandfather’s behalf.

A 1946 graduate of the university, Emerson served as a Marine Corps combat pilot during World War II before embarking on a successful decades-long career in the financial services industry. During their lifetimes, he and his wife, Jane, became major benefactors of the University of Florida, to include gifting the Emerson Courtyard to the university’s business school. Their contributions to the university ultimately resulted in the construction of Emerson Alumni Hall. Emerson, who also served from 1990-1992 as the President of the University of Florida Foundation, passed away in 2017 at the age of ninety-five.

“The University of Florida Association of Military Alumni congratulates all of our 2025 award winners,” said retired Marine Corps Col. Curt Ebitz, UFAMA president. “A key purpose for our association is to recognize Gators who serve — to connect generations of military-affiliated alumni, including service members, family members, and the civilian professionals who support them — and to preserve the legacy of service that runs through the University of Florida’s history. In that regard, this year’s awards and hall of fame banquet was a great success.”

This is the second year of the annual UFAMA awards and hall of fame banquet, which was attended by approximately 140 military-affiliated alumni, family members, and their friends. University of Florida Athletics Department ambassador and renowned college football coach Steve Spurrier provided the keynote remarks for the event, and UF Air Force ROTC Det. 150’s Billy Mitchell Drill Team and Arnold Air Society provided ceremonial support.

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