



— VIRGINIA SOCIETY of —
ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

YOUR

association

PRESS

January/February 2026

Congratulations!



The Awards of Excellence Honorees with VSAE's President, Abby Tammen. From left: Rita Matthews, Randy Grumbine, Abby, Connie Bruce, Terry Monroe, and Lee Ford.

On Friday, December 5, over 200 members and guests of the VSAE community came together to enjoy the holiday season at the 2025 Awards Luncheon & Silent Auction held at the Hilton Richmond Hotel & Spa Short Pump.

VSAE Awards of Excellence Honorees

The VSAE Awards of Excellence celebrate individuals whose leadership, service, and

dedication have left a lasting impact on VSAE and the broader association community. This year's honorees reflect the very best of our profession.

Randy Grumbine—CEO Award of Excellence

Randall "Randy" Grumbine has been a steady and respected leader within both his profession and the VSAE community. As Executive Director of

continued on page 5 >

Stronger Relationships to Drive Membership, Engagement, and Revenue



Association executives may work in industries like health care, real estate, or banking—but at their core, they are in the relationship business. Join us for our next in-person event—a workshop lead by Rodney Schosser, "Stronger Relationships to Drive Membership, and Revenue," on Thursday, March 5, at **The Jefferson Hotel**.

This two-hour, interactive workshop is both strategic and tactical, equipping participants with the psychological insights and practical tools that successful leaders use to identify, build, and sustain strong, trusted relationships. These relationships are critical to attracting new members, deepening engagement, and accelerating non-dues revenue through partnerships, sponsorships, and programs.

There will also be a session during lunch, "What AI Can't Do, and Never Will."

Earn 2.5 CAE credits. Register at vsae.org/calendar.

DON'T MISS IT!

MARCH WORKSHOP & LUNCHEON

THURSDAY, MARCH 5
The Jefferson Hotel

SCHEDULE

8:30 AM

Registration Opens

9:00–11:00 AM

Workshop:

Stronger Relationships to Drive Membership, Engagement, and Revenue

11:00–11:45 AM

Networking Reception

11:45 AM

Luncheon

REGISTER AT
[VSAE.ORG/CALENDAR](https://vsae.org/calendar)

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEBINAR

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

From Strategy to Action
Building Your Association's
Playbook for Alignment and
Accountability

MEETING PLANNER SUMMIT

New Views from the Hill City:
Meetings in These Changing
Times

MARCH 18–20

The Virginian Hotel
Lynchburg, VA

VIEW UPCOMING EVENTS AT
[VSAE.ORG/CALENDAR](https://vsae.org/calendar)

Thank You, 2026 Partners!

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VSAE Partners are Associate members who are actively engaged and financially committed to supporting VSAE and its programs and services. Through advertising, sponsorship, and scholarship, these Partners have pledged their support for 2026.

The 2026 Partners play a vital role in helping VSAE achieve its strategic goals: strengthening our association community and delivering value to members. When seeking industry services for your association, VSAE encourages you to connect with these Partners first—they are committed to helping your organization succeed.

There's still time to become a Partner! A variety of advertising and sponsorship opportunities are available to showcase your organization to Virginia's association professionals. Visit vsae.org/partner-program to learn more.

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ASAE's Legislative Fly-In March 23–24 Washington, DC

- Two Days of:**
- ✓ Policy Education
 - ✓ Advocacy
 - ✓ Networking

During ASAE's Fly In, attendees will:

Inform Hill staff about how their associations and other nonprofits make important contributions to communities across the country.

Help grow support for policies that promote a robust, inclusive workforce.

Learn key principles in association advocacy and tips to build successful policy programs.

ASAE's Fly In is also a terrific opportunity to network with peers from around the country.

**Register at
asaecenter.org
Contact David Walsh
(david@vsae.org)
if you plan to attend.**



As we start the year, I'm already energized by the first few months of my tenure and all that we've been able to accomplish together. The annual capstone to an amazing year—our Awards Luncheon and Silent Auction—was its most successful in the past five years. Support from our members and partners goes directly toward advancing VSAE's mission to help association professionals connect, learn, and lead.

In January, our Political Outlook Luncheon featuring VSAE favorite Dr. Bob Holsworth drew more than 130 attendees—our largest turnout since pre-COVID (read on in this issue for additional insights from Dr. Holsworth's talk). While these are two of VSAE's most popular events each year, the strong attendance was especially encouraging and reinforced what we're seeing across the board: our members are eager to come together to learn, network, and exchange ideas.

Having stepped into this role a few months ago, I feel fortunate that our Board and my predecessors have made VSAE's mission and vision crystal clear: to provide connection, learning, and leadership opportunities for association professionals—and to be the best at making associations the best.

In the final newsletter of 2025, I shared how engaged our Professional Development Committee has been in curating an education program that delivers real value. As we look ahead to VSAE's signature event—the Annual Conference, May 3–5 at the Williamsburg Lodge & Conference Center—I'm thrilled with how the program is coming together. The conference will feature thoughtfully designed educational tracks addressing the issues association professionals care most about, helping them exceed expectations both personally and within their organizations.

Being the Best at Making Associations the Best

"Let's not be afraid to experiment together as we continue to innovate and make VSAE an even more valuable home for our members."

Sessions will cover topics such as strengthening teams and culture, improving board–executive alignment, uncovering the drivers of membership retention, and practical AI tactics associations can put to work immediately. That last topic underscores a broader point: our committee has been intentional about building a program with actionable takeaways for professionals across a wide range of roles—from the C-suite to membership, events, and beyond.

This work is grounded in a strong foundation. Our highly engaged Board of Directors has invested significant time in creating clear charters for VSAE's standing committees, helping define purpose and expectations for all who serve. One great example is our Community Service Committee, which has formed meaningful partnerships with high-impact charities across Virginia. In 2025 alone, VSAE supported six charities, raised more than \$3,500 for important causes, and donated over 180 pounds of food to FeedMore.

In closing, let's not be afraid to experiment together. I invite your feedback and ideas on how we can continue to innovate and make VSAE an even more valuable home for our members—because that's how we remain the best at making associations the best.

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INSTITUTE CONFERENCE CENTER





> **Awards Luncheon**, continued from page 1

the Virginia Manufactured and Modular Housing Association, Randy has spent the past decade guiding his organization with thoughtfulness and integrity, building on a long career that includes more than 20 years with Clayton Homes.

A committed VSAE member for nearly a decade, Randy has served on the VSAE Board of Directors, participated actively in the CEO SIG, and consistently shown up as a collaborative and solutions-oriented colleague. His peers value his perspective, calm leadership style, and commitment to strengthening associations across Virginia. His leadership has also been recognized nationally, including being named State Executive of the Year by his industry peers.

Connie Bruce—Association Staff Award

Connie Bruce is widely admired for her warmth, professionalism, and unwavering dedication to the association community. As Associate Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of Virginia CEOs, Connie has spent two decades helping leaders connect, learn, and grow.

A VSAE member for nearly 15 years, Connie is a graduate of Association Leadership Virginia and a Certified Association Executive. She has contributed extensively through committee service and has been a welcoming, knowledgeable presence at more than 50 VSAE events. Known for uplifting those around her, Connie brings heart, hospitality, and collaboration to everything she does, making a meaningful and lasting impact on VSAE and its members.

Rita Matthews—Associate Member Award

For more than 20 years, Rita Matthews has been a trusted partner and enthusiastic ambassador for both VisitNorfolk and VSAE. As Senior Sales Manager, Rita is known for her relationship-driven approach, exceptional service, and genuine care for the association community.

Rita has been a devoted VSAE member for more than two decades, actively participating

in events, committees, and signature programs. She played a key role in hosting VSAE's Annual Conferences in Norfolk, including helping celebrate VSAE's 75th anniversary, and has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure members feel welcomed and supported. Her many professional honors reflect what VSAE members already know—Rita is a connector, collaborator, and champion for the meetings industry.

Lee Ford—Career Service Award

Lee Ford's nearly 40-year career at the Greater Richmond Convention Center left an indelible mark on the association community. Beginning in 1985, Lee built a reputation for consistency, responsiveness, and a client-first mindset that supported thousands of events over decades of service.

While not an association professional by title, Lee's work placed her at the heart of countless VSAE and member events, where her calm presence and problem-solving skills made every group feel valued. Many VSAE members have benefited directly from her dedication, and her recent retirement marks the close of an extraordinary career defined by service, loyalty, and care.

Terry Monroe—Outstanding Leadership Award

Terry Monroe's leadership helped guide VSAE through one of the most challenging periods in its history. During his five years as Executive Director, Terry provided steady, thoughtful leadership in the wake of the pandemic, strengthening governance, expanding programs, and growing membership at a time when associations needed stability most.

With nearly three decades in the association profession, Terry's leadership is grounded in service and a deep commitment to leaving organizations better than he found them. Even after stepping away from his role at VSAE, Terry continues to contribute to the profession through consulting and thought leadership. This

See more photos from the event at vsae.org/blog

honor recognizes his lasting impact on VSAE and the association community as a whole.

SILENT AND LIVE AUCTIONS

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our members and partners, VSAE's 2025 Silent Auction was our most successful in the past five years, raising funds to support VSAE education programs and member resources. With over 90 auction prizes and donations, and strong engagement across both the online and live auctions, the event captured the energy and momentum of a great year for VSAE.

In addition to fundraising success, members donated over 180 pounds of food to Feed More and raised money for the Richmond Animal Care and Control Foundation, reinforcing VSAE's ongoing commitment to community impact. We are deeply grateful to our auction donors, bidders, and VSAE's Community Service Committee for helping make this year's Silent Auction such a meaningful success.

During the luncheon, Ernie Rogers of Blacktie Benefit Auctions helped bring the excitement to a close by auctioning off two grand prizes. Congratulations to Jay Matthews, who won a three-night, four-day trip to Bermuda generously donated by the Bermuda Tourism Authority, and to Ray Mattes, who won a two-night stay for six at the Virginia Guesthouse Hotel in Charlottesville (opening this April), along with a wine tasting at Southwest Mountain Vineyards and three bottles of wine.

Thank you to everyone who made this year's Awards Luncheon & Silent Auction such a tremendous success, including the Silent Auction Task Force, Community Services Committee, Awards Committee, Eisenman & Associates staff, the Hilton Richmond Hotel & Spa at Short Pump, and—most importantly—our generous sponsors, donors, and enthusiastic bidders.

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LET'S RECAP

Virginia's Political Outlook

More than 130 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Richmond for VSAE's annual Virginia Political Outlook Luncheon on Friday, January 9, where Dr. Bob Holsworth shared timely insights into the political forces shaping the Commonwealth as the 2026 election cycle approaches. Holsworth's remarks focused less on predicting specific outcomes and more on understanding the broader environment in which policy decisions will be made—an important distinction for association leaders navigating advocacy, member engagement, and long-term strategy.

Virginia remains one of the nation's most politically competitive states. Control of statewide offices and the General Assembly often hinges on narrow margins, reinforcing how small shifts in turnout and engagement can produce meaningful change. For associations, this environment typically favors incremental progress over sweeping policy shifts, placing a premium on credibility, consistency, and relationship-building.

Holsworth emphasized that voter participation — particularly among younger voters and suburban communities — is likely to be a decisive factor in upcoming elections. Rather than major ideological



See more photos from the event at vsae.org/blog

realignment, outcomes are increasingly driven by who shows up. This reality has implications for grassroots engagement, member communication, and advocacy planning.

Association leaders should continue to expect closely divided government and legislative sessions shaped by negotiation and compromise. In this environment, patience, coalition-building, and sustained engagement across party lines remain essential tools for advancing organizational priorities.

Virginia's political landscape is no longer insulated from national trends. Messaging, media narratives, and voter sentiment at the national level are increasingly influencing state and local races. For associations, this adds complexity to both advocacy

strategy and external communications, requiring leaders to stay attuned to broader political currents.

The luncheon followed VSAE's first-ever Book Club discussion earlier that morning, which brought members together for thoughtful conversation ahead of the program. The group discussed *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara, exploring how exceeding expectations can strengthen relationships — a theme that carried through the day's discussions.

The event was graciously hosted by Omni Richmond Hotel, whose team provided an exceptional setting and hospitality that helped make the gathering both welcoming and memorable. Special shoutout to the chefs for providing a terrific Greek-inspired meal that included everything from kebabs to traditional moussaka. In addition, the event raised more than \$700 in support of Forward Foundation of Virginia, which serves single parents in the Greater Richmond area who are facing financial hardship following a life-altering event. As Virginia enters another closely watched political cycle, Holsworth's message resonated clearly: for association leaders, success depends less on predicting election outcomes and more on understanding the environment, building trust, and remaining consistently engaged.

Abby's Leadership Lesson Series

During my opening remarks at the 2025 Annual Conference, I shared six personal leadership lessons that have shaped my path. Throughout this year, I'll be spotlighting each one here in our newsletter, with the hope that they'll offer insight, encouragement, and a fresh perspective for your own leadership journey.



Leadership Lesson #5: Leadership Starts with Respect and Humility

Respect and humility are two of the most powerful forces a leader can bring to their organization. When leaders show respect, they acknowledge the value each person contributes. It signals that ideas, efforts, and people matter. Respect strengthens relationships and encourages teams to bring their best work forward.

Humility deepens that impact. A humble leader doesn't assume they have all the answers; they create room for others to contribute their expertise. They listen fully, ask thoughtful questions, and recognize that leadership is a shared endeavor. Humility also builds credibility—teams trust leaders who are willing to learn, adapt, and give credit where it's due.

Together, respect and humility shape a leadership approach that elevates people, strengthens organizations, and creates lasting impact.



New Views from the Hill City: Meetings in These Changing Times

Join fellow association and not-for-profit meeting planners March 18–20 at **The Virginian Hotel** for a fun, collaborative learning experience designed by meeting planners for meeting planners. From building resilient crisis plans to exploring practical AI tools, you'll gain fresh, actionable insights to elevate your next event.

Earn 6.25 CEU/CAE credits while you learn from each other, outside industry experts, and representatives from hotels and CVBs.

SCHEDULE

Wednesday, March 18

5:30–7:30 pm Join us for a Pre-Summit warm-up—a welcome reception at **The Virginian Hotel** paired with an evening in historic Downtown Lynchburg, where the Super Rad Arcade Bar offers a throwback to the golden age of arcade fun.

Thursday, March 19

9:00–9:15 am Welcome and Introductions
9:15–10:15 am **Session 1: The AI-Enabled Conference Planner: Real Lessons from Building a Modern Association Conference** (1.00 CEU)
10:45–11:45 am **Session 2: State of the Industry from the Virginia Tourism Board** (1.00 CEU)
12:00–1:00 pm Networking Lunch
1:00–1:45 pm Property Tour
2:00–2:45 pm **Session 3: Social Media for Meeting Planners: A Tutorial** (0.75 CEU)
3:15–4:15 pm **Session 4: Panel - Industry Changes and How We Are Pivoting - From a Meeting Planner Perspective and a Hotel Perspective** (1.00 CEU)
5:30–6:30 pm Reception
6:30–8:30 pm Dinner
8:30–9:30 pm After-dinner Event

Friday, March 20

7:30–8:30 am Breakfast
8:30–9:45 am **Session 5: Scavenger Hunt: Get to Know Downtown Lynchburg... and Your Fellow Attendees** (1.25 CEU)
10:00–11:15 am **Session 6: Why Didn't I Think of That? Sharing Strategies, Successes, and Smart Solutions** (1.25 CEU)
11:15–11:30 am Closing Remarks
11:30 am Pick Up Boxed Lunches to Go

THIS RETREAT IS LIMITED TO ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONALS, MEETING PLANNERS, AND SPONSORS. ONLINE REGISTRATION CLOSES FRIDAY, MARCH 13 AT NOON.

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Saturday, May 2

Schedule subject to change.

9:00 am-5:00 pm	Discounted Busch Gardens tickets available
6:00-7:00 pm	Executive Director's Reception (invitation only)

Sunday, May 3

10:00 am-4:00 pm	Pre-conference Activities
5:00-6:00 pm	New Member and First-Time Attendee Mixer (invitation only)
6:00-7:30 pm	Opening Reception (all attendees)
7:30 pm	Dine on Your Own

Monday, May 4

7:00-8:15 am	Breakfast
8:15-8:30 am	Opening Remarks
8:30-9:30 am	OPENING KEYNOTE: THE BUCKET LIST LIFE
9:45-11:00 am	Breakout Sessions • More Than a Vision Statement: Operationalizing Transformation in Associations • Ethical Decision-Making for Today's Association Leaders • Beyond Membership: Strengthening Culture and Performance in Association Teams
11:15 am-12:45 pm	Luncheon, 2026-2027 Board Installation and CAE Recognitions
1:00-2:15 pm	Breakout Sessions • Mission-Driven Leadership: Uniting Governance and Volunteer Engagement • Befriending the Black Swan: Planning for Effective Crisis Communication • From Transition to Continuity: Strengthening Board - Executive Alignment
2:30-3:30 pm	Breakout Sessions • Navigating Burnout in the Association World • Digging for Truth: Uncovering Drivers of Membership & Retention
3:30-4:30 pm	Shared Interest Group (SIG) Meetings
5:30-6:15 pm	President's Reception (invitation only)
6:30-7:30 pm	Pre-Dinner Reception
7:30-9:00 pm	Dinner
9:00 pm	Dessert & After Dinner Entertainment

Tuesday, May 5

8:00-9:00 am	Breakfast
8:00-9:00 am	Book Club
9:00-10:15 am	CLOSING KEYNOTE: CHOOSE TO RISE: 5 KEYS TO MAINTAIN BALANCE AND IGNITE MOMENTUM
10:30-11:30 am	General Session No Theory, Just Practice: Real AI Tactics Your Association Can Steal Today
11:30-11:45 am	Closing Remarks and 2027 Annual Conference Host Announcement

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PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

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Whether you need a high-tech conference space or a setting rich with history, SoSi has it all. The Institute Conference Center boasts more than 25,000 square feet of premier meeting space, while Caesars Virginia features a 51,000-square-foot Convention Center. For countryside elegance, Berry Hill Resort & Conference Center offers both scenic views and luxurious indoor facilities. Looking for something unique? Explore Cottontail Weddings & Events, Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex, or Motley's Mill Waterfall Estate. No matter your style, SoSi delivers.

Your comfort is never compromised. Stay at The Bee Hotel in Danville's River District for a buzzworthy experience in a renovated newspaper office or enjoy modern luxury at The Holbrook Hotel in the Old West End Historic District. Caesars Virginia Resort and Casino adds excitement with 320 guest rooms and entertainment at your doorstep. With more than 1,200 rooms across the region, SoSi is ready to accommodate every guest.

Extend your stay with attractions and nightlife: sip a flight at Ballad Brewing, stroll the Riverwalk Trail, or enjoy live music under the stars at 2 Witches Winery and Brewing Co. Thrill seekers can head to VIRginia International Raceway, while history lovers explore the Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History and Millionaire's Row. Dining options are always within reach, from King Cropp Kitchen to Golden Leaf Bistro, each offering local flavor and hospitality.



Meet Lisa Meriwether, Your SoSi Guide

Behind every memorable event in SoSi is a guiding hand who brings it all together: Lisa Meriwether, Tourism Manager. With a wealth of hospitality experience and a passion for her community, Lisa has become the go-to partner for planners who want their gatherings to be seamless, distinctive, and unforgettable.

What makes Lisa invaluable is her ability to listen and craft solutions that fit your vision. She knows every venue, every partner, and every hidden gem across Danville and Pittsylvania County. From large-scale conventions to intimate retreats, Lisa ensures you'll find the perfect setting and the right support to make your event shine. Her dedication means you'll not only host a successful event but also discover the authentic spirit of SoSi along the way.

Ready to turn your plans into reality? Connect with Lisa and the Visit SoSi team at VisitSoSi.com or reach out directly at lisa.meriwether@visitsosi.com to see why Southern Virginia is the destination where events thrive.

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A nighttime photograph of the Caesars Virginia Resort and Casino. The large, modern building with many windows is illuminated from within, and its reflection is visible in the water in the foreground. The Caesars logo is visible on the building's facade. In the foreground, there's a parking lot with several cars and some landscaping.

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