

Don Staley Honored With ARHA's Lifetime Achievement Award

Former TTS President & CEO Don Staley was honored by the statewide industry group for his long career and contributions.



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Former TTS President & CEO Don Staley (Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Association)

TUSCALOOSA, AL — Former University of Alabama soccer coach and retired Tuscaloosa Tourism & Sports President and CEO Don Staley was recently presented the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Association (ARHA) during its Stars of the Industry awards.

The award winners were announced by the ARHA on Nov. 14 at The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center. Honorees are peer-nominated and winners were voted on by the Stars committee and ARHA's Board of Directors.

Staley has since moved to Leesburg, Florida after his retirement, but said he was excited to return to Alabama and has missed the "friendly people" of the state. What's more, he said the award was an unexpected honor.

"I was very fortunate to work with some amazing people to help promote tourism in this great state," Staley told Patch. "Whether it was building the Alabama women's soccer program from its beginnings in 1994; Promoting the SEC women's soccer championships moving to Orange Beach, where it stayed for 20 years; Helping design, book and operate the mega \$32.6 million sports complex in Foley; The relief efforts at the Leland Shopping Center in Alberta after the 2011 tornado or returning to Tuscaloosa promote tourism and create the Druid City Music Festival."

[As Patch previously reported](#), Staley announced his retirement over the summer and temporarily moved into an advisory role in July before fully stepping down.

Staley served two tours of duty at TTS, first hired as executive director of sports in 2010 before leaving after four years for a job in Foley. He returned to TTS to take on the top job in 2017 and oversaw the launch of numerous events and initiatives, including the Druid City Music Festival and the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights Trail.

As the Crimson Tide soccer program advanced over the weekend to the NCAA Women's Soccer Tournament quarterfinals for the first time

in the program's history, it was Staley who was the program's first coach.

Over more than two decades in coaching, including a stop at Radford University, he compiled over 300 career wins and became one of the most decorated college coaches in the sport.

"Don built a strong house," TTS President & CEO Kelsey Rush said in June after Staley announced his retirement. "He didn't even lay the foundation. He built the whole house and my hope is just to keep that house stable ... Don has played such a huge role in creating an experience economy for our community. Literally the number of events that he's touched in some way, shape or form is probably in the thousands. That's memories that families have made, restaurants and bars filled with guests traveling to our city, jobs created, and more. If only we knew the economic impact of the things that Don has had his hand in, but that's a legacy in itself."