



SAR Alabama



Volume 40, Number 1

March, 2026

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Compatriots, friends, and partners in patriotism,

First and foremost, please accept my sincere apology for this newsletter's tardiness; it is my sole responsibility. I thank Editor Tim Gayle for being exceedingly patient with me the past several weeks as I discover some of the not-so-obvious responsibilities and expectations of the office while participating in multiple America 250, SAR and SAR/DAR events. I am also grateful to former PG Bruce Pickette's guidance and advice over these past few months along with encouragement and support received from the fine group of ALSAR officers, committee chairs and chapter presidents.

We held our 2026 annual meeting and convention on March 13-14, closing one chapter in the life of the Alabama Society and opening another that I pray will continue our collective successes over the years. I want to share a brief update on where we stand, where we are going, and how each of you plays a vital role in advancing the mission entrusted to us. This year's convention was a tremendous success, thanks to the dedication of our officers, chapter leaders, committee chairs and the many volunteers who make our Society thrive. Your commitment to patriotic service,

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Ron Dains installed as ALSSAR president at March convention

The ALSSAR annual convention was held on March 13-14 at the Hoover Embassy Suites, where a new slate of officers was installed for 2025-26.

The highlight of the Saturday night banquet included the installation of new officers, including president Ronald N. Dains, Gen. John Archer Elmore chapter; vice president William A. Carter, Cahaba-Coosa; secretary William I. Sauser Jr., Richard Henry Lee; recording secretary Jack D. Tribble, at large; treasurer Scott A. Martin, Cahaba-Coosa; registrar Ronald A. Bearden, Little River; genealogist Earl Gillian Jr., Gen. John Archer Elmore; chancellor Jay G. Maples, Tennessee Valley; historian William T. Dean III, Gen. John Archer Elmore; chaplain Preston E. (Buddy) Irving, Black Warrior River; sergeant-at-arms Joseph D. Barker, Gen. John Archer Elmore; trustee Benny



—Photo by Janice Jennings

ALSSAR president Benny Hannah places neck ribbon on new president Ron Dains.

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Chapter holds compatriot grave marking



—Photo by Denetiza Jones

The ALSSAR Color Guard presents the colors at the grave-marking ceremony for Dallas Jones on March 28.

The Black Warrior River chapter hosted a compatriot grave marking for Dallas M. Jones on March 28 in Danville.

Jones passed away on Dec. 11, 2025, and was interred on Dec. 15 at Johnson Chapel Cemetery in Danville. Coordination was made with compatriot Benny Hannah who provided the marker for the ceremony.

Wreaths were presented by the Alabama Society, the Black Warrior River chapter, the ALSSAR Color

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Message

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historical preservation, and educational outreach continues to honor the legacy of our Patriot ancestors.

Words of Gratitude

I extend heartfelt appreciation to **past president Benny Hannah** for his steadfast leadership of the Society throughout 2025. His efforts strengthened relationships with DAR and C.A.R., expanded partnerships, secured significant grant support to position us well for the year ahead. As I said during the banquet, we are grateful for his and **Iris'** perseverance, mentorship and friendship.

We were also honored by the presence of our keynote speaker **NSSAR Secretary General Allen Greenly, Registrar General Keith Weissinger, and Southern District Vice President General Dr. John Fulwider**, whose leadership at the national level continues to inspire our efforts here in Alabama. Our convention was blessed with the presence of many DAR members, Auxiliary members, spouses and families who support our work. They remain the heart of our Society's success.

2026 Annual Convention Highlights Membership & Reconciliation

Our **past secretary** and current **vice president Bill Carter** completed our reconciliation process in February and I, along with **past president Benny Hannah**, thank him for his diligence and attention to details. While we welcomed **112 new additions** (including new, junior, transfers and reinstated members), we also experienced a net loss of **161 compatriots** due to death, drops and non-renewals, resulting in **956 ALSSAR members** on Jan. 1.

As I emphasized in my remarks: **Retention is not a mystery, it is a matter of mentorship, communication and personal care.** Every new member should receive a welcome packet, be assigned a mentor, frequent encouragement to participate in activities, and receive recognition for their efforts. I am fully confident in the collective ability of all ALSSAR compatriots to reverse the membership trend and emphasize the important role of chapter presidents and officers in this effort.

Financial Health

Treasurer Scott Martin reported that ALSSAR remains in excellent financial condition, with **\$96,261.19 in reconciled cash** and **\$108,608.87 in total assets.** These resources support our youth programs, outreach efforts and operational needs and I am grateful for Scott's attentiveness to the Society's financial well-being.

Registrar's Report

Our chapters continue to bring in strong applicants, and the quality of genealogical work remains high. Thank you to **Registrar Ron Bearden** for his continued leadership and training efforts along with those of **Genealogist Earl Gillian.** I can honestly say our Society would be less without your tireless efforts.

Chapter & Committee Engagement

Reports across the Society show vibrant activity—from Eagle Scouts to JROTC, from cemetery preservation to Americanism programs. The work you do in your communities is the

living expression of our mission. Following the annual convention I sent a roster and organizational chart of ALSSAR officers, liaisons, committee chairs and chapter presidents for 2026. Most notably, I placed the ALSSAR Council of Youth Programs, with **Chair David Jones** and **Co-Chair Scott Majala** at the head of all Youth Programs to assist myself and **vice president Bill Carter** in ensuring clear communication, effective competition processes, and accurate award presentations. I look forward to the Youth Awards program during our 2027 annual convention and pray that we continue to expand participation by our Alabama youth.

Chaplain and Color Guard

Chaplain Buddy Irving honored the memory of ALSSAR compatriots who passed away in 2025 with a moving service at the banquet's beginning followed by **compatriot Bob Anderson's** presentation of the *Missing Man Table* honoring those who were captured by enemy forces or remain missing. Together they remind us that freedom and liberty are often paid for by human loss. Throughout the convention and as they do across Alabama on a near-weekly basis, our ALSSAR Color Guard led by its commander, **Joe Barker**, presented the colors in a highly professional and patriotic manner. Our Society is stronger due to their collective efforts and encourage all members to support SAR activities.

ALSSAR Strategic Priorities for 2026

Drawing from the NSSAR Strategic Plan and the goals I outlined during the banquet, our Society will focus on three major priorities this year:

1. Strengthen External Communication & Public Visibility

Our story is worth telling—we should tell it boldly and often.

2. Build a Mentorship-Driven Culture

Membership is important; **mentorship is transformational.**

3. Expand Public Awareness of Historical Preservation

Historical preservation is not just remembrance, it is outreach.

Reinforcing Our Mission

Everything we do must reflect the three pillars of the SAR Mission:

Patriotic Service

Historical Preservation

Educational Outreach

These are not abstract ideas—they are the daily work of our Society. Whether you are speaking in a classroom, marking a grave, presenting an award, or mentoring a new member, you are advancing the cause of liberty.

Looking Ahead

As your president, I pledge to lead with humility, purpose and selfless service. The American Revolution was won by people who believed in a cause greater than themselves. Let us carry that same spirit into our work this year.

Together, we will honor our past, strengthen our present and embrace our future.

Thank you for your trust—and may God bless the Alabama Society and the United States of America!

—Ron Dains



—Photo courtesy of Ron Dains

ALSSAR officers installed for 2026-27 are, from left: sergeant-at-arms Joe Barker, chancellor Jay Maples, registrar Ron Bearden, recording secretary Jack Tribble, vice president Bill Carter, president Ron Dains, secretary Bill Sauser, treasurer Scott Martin, genealogist Earl Gillian Jr. and chaplain Rev. Buddy Irving. Not pictured is historian James “Skip” Dotherow III.

Convention

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Hannah, Tennessee Valley; alternate trustee Ronald N. Dains, Gen. John Archer Elmore.

At the Saturday morning business meeting, ALSSAR president Benny Hannah introduced special guests Allen Greenly, NSSAR Secretary General; Dr. Keith Weissinger, NSSAR Registrar General; Bruce Pickette, past NSSAR President General; Edmon McKinley, past NSSAR Chancellor General; Jim Maples, past ALSSAR President; Jim Griffith, past ALSSAR President; John Fulwider, Vice President General Southern District; David Billings, past Vice President General, NSSAR; Michael Schenk, past MSSSAR president; Dr. Keith Goodfellow, MSSSAR Secretary General; P. Z. Horton, President, TNSSAR.

Hannah asked Eric Alford to share information on the 2027 NSSAR Congress, hosted by the Southern District states in New Orleans on July 9-15 at the New Orleans Marriott located on Canal Street. The Southern District includes the states of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, and this Congress will be a major gathering for SAR members from these states. Alford urged our four Southern District societies to have their chapters donate to the Congress event and encourage their compatriots to participate as Congress volunteers.

In the secretary's report, Bill Carter corrected total membership to 1,100 members in the Alabama Society, a 12 percent drop from the previous year.

President Hannah stressed the need to manage the collection of dues to assure meeting the due date and correctly reconciling the dues. He also asked all chapters to “Keep it Exciting” as a way to maintain membership.

Ron Dains suggested writing a personal letter to inactive members to encourage them to return to active status. A personal letter

will likely be more effective than an email.

Hannah invited Keith Weissinger, NSSAR Registrar General, to share his comments. Dr. Weissinger commented that the SAR new members is the highest since 2017. Total members are 34,869, an increase of 677 or 2 percent. Retention of members is at 89 percent.

Compatriot David Jones reported on the George Washington Endowment Fund, expressing the need to increase donations to the Endowment Fund. Jones also reminded compatriots that ALSSAR flags are available for \$40.

Nominating committee member Edmon McKinley named the submitted nominees for this year's ALSSAR officers and asked if there were any nominations from the floor. None were submitted.

Awards were presented in recognition of membership recruiting efforts within the Alabama Society.

The ALSSAR member with the largest number of first line sponsorships of new members approved in 2025 was Ron Bearden (16 members), followed by Ray Vaughn Cassell (12), James N. Phillips (7) and Jack David Tribble (7).

The ALSSAR member with the largest number of new supplemental applications approved in 2025 was George Washington Royer Jr., with five. Paul Gaston Petznick and Gaston Lee Petznick both had four.

The ALSSAR chapter with the largest number of new members approved in 2025 was awarded to the Tennessee Valley chapter with 29. The Birmingham chapter had the largest percentage of new members at 15.9 percent.

The ALSSAR chapter with the largest percentage of retained membership in 2025 was the Black Warrior River chapter (97.8 percent), which edged out Little River (96.3 percent).

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In Memory...

Wesley Dewitt Smith Gaines Eugene Gravlee

The Alabama Society recently lost two valuable compatriots as Wes Smith and Gene Gravlee passed away.

WESLEY DEWITT SMITH, a member of the Tennessee Valley chapter, passed away on March 8. He was 65.

Wes was born on Feb. 23, 1961, at Carraway Hospital in Birmingham. He grew up in Gardendale where he built lifelong friendships and graduated from Gardendale High School in 1979.

In 1984, he proudly joined the United States Navy and served honorably until 1988. During his military service, he worked in Internal Communications and was stationed aboard the submarines USS James K. Polk and the USS Ray. His service allowed him to travel extensively, including St. Croix, St. Thomas, Cuba, England, Scotland, Norway, Russia, and even the North Pole; experiences he carried with pride throughout his life.

After completing his naval service, Wes moved to Cullman and began working in telecommunications for the City of Huntsville IT Department. In 1994, he married his wife Gina and moved to Huntsville with their daughter, Lauren. In 1996, they welcomed their son, Daniel.

Wes had a deep love for the outdoors. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, spending time at his family farm, working on his truck "Big Red" and cheering on Alabama football. He was very handy; if it was broken, he could fix it—and he was always willing to lend a hand. He also had a special love for animals and cared deeply for all his pets, especially his beloved dog, Mookie. Above all else, he treasured time spent with his children and grandchildren.

Wes was a faithful attendee of Latham Church and remained actively involved in his community.

He is survived by his wife Gina, children Lauren Stiles (Justin) and Daniel Smith (Emily) and cherished grandchildren, Reagan, Benjamin and Caroline Stiles and Hunter Smith.

Services were held at Latham Church on March 11. He was buried in Vinemont, next to his father.

GENE GRAVLEE, an at-large ALSSAR member and a resident of Sumiton, passed away on May 22. He was 86.

Gene was born on May 5, 1940, one of eight children born to Walton Jackson Gravlee and Willie Mae (Roberts) Gravlee. He grew up in a family whose roots run deep in Alabama soil, the grandson of George Strother Gravlee and Ada Elizabeth (Sellers) Gravlee, and George Felon Roberts and Alma (Burton) Roberts, and he carried their stories and values forward throughout his life. One great-grandfather was Harvey Jackson Gravlee, and another great-great-grandfather was William Gravlee, the progenitor of the family in Alabama.

Gene served others throughout his life. He was both an Alabama State Trooper sergeant and a U.S. Air Force Reserve master sergeant. He carried himself in both roles with integrity, fairness, and deep responsibility.

Gene loved learning, preserving family history and sharing those stories with others. As a historian and genealogist, he took great joy in honoring his family's roots and ensuring those memories would endure. He published authoritative works on Alabama cemeteries, was a firearms expert and an avid hunter.

He joined the Sons of the American Revolution in 2000 and became an at-large member after his chapter disbanded.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Linda Ann (Spears) Gravlee, with whom he shared a life of partnership and devotion of almost 65 years. He is also survived by his son, Michael Eugene Gravlee, and Michael's wife, Laura Frances (Golson) Gravlee; and his daughter, Linda Michelle (Gravlee) Cooke, and her husband, Stanley Kyle Cooke. Gene was a proud grandfather to Michael and Laura's daughters, Rachel Laura (Gravlee) Lowery and Rebecca Ann (Gravlee) Waycaster, and to Stan and Michelle's daughters, Heather Michelle (Cooke) Hill and Heidi Loren (Cooke) O'Donnell.

Services were held on May 30 at the Sumiton Church of God. Graveside services followed at New Horizon Memorial Garden in Dora with pastors Lane Sargent, Tim Salors and Harv Turner officiating. Honor Guards from the United States Air Force and Alabama State Troopers were on hand to honor Gene's life of service.

—Photo courtesy of Bruce Pickette

Montgomery chapter inducts new members

Gen. Richard Montgomery compatriot Keith Norman gave a talk on the Declaration of Independence at the chapter's May meeting. The meeting concluded with the induction of Henry Frazer and his son John as the chapter's newest compatriots. They are shown, from left, with former chapter president Bruce Pickette, John Frazer, Henry Frazer and chapter president William Kirkland. The Frazers join their brother and uncle, Hugh Frazer as members of the chapter.



Convention

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The ALSSAR chapter with the largest number of supplemental applications approved in 2025 was the Tennessee Valley chapter with 12.

At the Saturday night banquet, Hannah presented the individual awards to deserving compatriots.

The SAR Medal of Appreciation is presented to a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution in recognition of and in appreciation for outstanding services rendered to the Alabama Society. The award was presented to Mary Griffith.

The SAR Daughters of Liberty Medal is the highest lady's medal, recognizing a person for unselfish devotion, tireless efforts and assistance to the Alabama Society. The award was presented to Janice Jennings.

The Lydia Darragh Medal, recognizing the assistance of the ladies who work behind the scenes supporting SAR programs, was presented to Iris Hannah.

The Outstanding Citizenship Award, a lapel pin awarded to deserving students in recognition of high ideals of character and citizenship, was presented Lydia Lanford at the youth awards luncheon.

The Silver Children of the American Revolution - Sons of the American Revolution Medal of Appreciation was presented to Alabama CAR senior state president Jennifer Pennington.

The Bronze Color Guard Medal, awarded for Color Guard Service to the ALSSAR, was awarded to Lawrence E. Hillis, who was not in attendance and will be presented later at a Tennessee Valley chapter meeting.

The Silver Color Guard Medal, also awarded for Color Guard Service and approved at the national level, was awarded to William E. Daniel Jr. and Donis R. Wolfe Sr.

The Von Steuben Medal for Sustained Achievement in the NSSAR Color Guard was awarded to Randal Scot Jennings.

The State Color Guard Commander's Medal, awarded to a State Color Guard commander after completion of two years in office, was presented to current State Color Guard commander Joe Barker and to past State Color Guard commander Tom Smith.

The Silver Henry Knox Medal, awarded to a compatriot or non-SAR member to recognize a specific outstanding contribution, achievement, accomplishment, deed, performance or effort, was presented to several members for their outstanding support of ALS-SAR youth programs, including Robert L. Anderson Jr., James Daniel Armstrong III, Carl Arnold (Arnie) Burris, James E. (Skip) Dotherow, David M. Jones, William A. Kirkland II, Edmon H. McKinley and Charles Roberts (Rob) Stone.

The Silver Roger Sherman Medal, awarded to a compatriot in recognition of, and in appreciation of, outstanding services rendered to a state society, was presented to Ronald N. Dains and Jack D. Tribble.

The Meritorious Service Medal, awarded in recognition of long, faithful and meritorious service to the Alabama Society, was presented to Scott A. Martin and Jay G. Maples.

The SAR State Medal of Distinguished Service, awarded by the ALSSAR president to a compatriot in recognition for that compatriot's conspicuous service to the State Society and to the state president during the president's administration, was presented to David Jones.

The SAR Patriot Medal, the highest award from the state society which recognizes long, faithful and outstanding service at the state and/or chapter level, was presented to David Michael Martin, Jr.



—Photo by Janice Jennings

ALSSAR president Benny Hannah, right, is awarded the District Silver Meritorious Service Medal from VPG Dr. John Fulwider.



—Photo by Janice Jennings

NSSAR Secretary General Allen Greenly names Jack Tribble as his adjutant.



—Photo by Ron Dains

ALSSAR president Benny Hannah meets with Ladies Auxiliary to present award to Iris Hannah.



—Photo courtesy of William Rozier

Past Cheaha presidents honored
The Cheaha chapter honored the chapter's past presidents at the monthly meeting on March 11 in the Anniston/Calhoun County Public Library. Chapter president Ron Burson (far left) and vice president Randy Boyer (far right) presented a special program honoring the past leaders of the chapter and recognizing the three past presidents who attended, from left: Bob Folsom, Rev. Jeff Coker and Eric Sloughfy.

Ceremony

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Guard, the Button Gwinnett (Ga.) chapter, the Pickens County DAR and the Birmingham Territory DAR.

Sixteen SAR members participated in the event, 12 of which were members of the Color and Honor Guard. Black Warrior River president Stephen Asbury presided over the event with ALSSAR vice president Bill Carter bringing greetings and the dedication. ALSSAR Chaplain Rev. Preston "Buddy" Irving provided the invocation and benediction for the service.

Compatriot Jeffery Jones spoke on behalf of the Jones family. He spoke about the history of the Jones family's involvement with the Sons of the American Revolution and the mission of the SAR. He encouraged everyone present to research their family and American history. He spoke of the Jones' patriot ancestor Reuben Roberts and the many descendants buried in the Johnson Chapel Cemetery and in nearby cemeteries located in the Neel and Basham communities.

Grandsons of compatriot Jones, compatriots Lane and Wyatt Adcock unveiled the marker during the ceremony.

Commander Joe Barker led the Color Guard and David Jones commanded the Honor Guard.

Compatriot Joe Barker has initiated a tradition of placing flags at the grave of veterans when the ALSSAR Color Guard participates in grave marking ceremonies, a simple informal ceremony with honors paid to the deceased veteran as a U.S. flag is placed on the grave.

—David Jones



—Photos by Denetiza Jones

The Honor Guard fires a volley on orders from David Jones at the grave-marking ceremony on March 28 in Danville, above; Buddy Irving, below left, and chapter president Stephen Asbury give remarks.





—Photos courtesy of Stephen Hooks

Peter the Patriot entertains Etowah

The Etowah chapter held one of its best attended meetings in several years on Feb. 23, entertaining compatriots from neighboring SAR and DAR chapters and inducting two new members, left. The guests included members of the James Gadsden DAR chapter as well as SAR members from Little River, Cheaha and Gen. John Archer Elmore chapters. Peter the Patriot was the guest speaker at the meeting and kept the crowd entertained. After the meeting, chapter president Stephen Hooks and ALSSAR registrar Ron Bearden spoke to Peter and the husband of a DAR member about joining the SAR.



—Photos courtesy of William Rozier

Cheaha chapter discusses religious influences in colonial times at April monthly meeting

Dr. Vic Minish, center, with vice president Randy Boyer and president Ron Burson, discussed “The Religious Influence in Colonial Times” at the monthly meeting of the Cheaha chapter on April 8 at the Anniston-Calhoun County Public Library. Prior to his presentation, compatriot Eric Sloughfy, center in right photo, was presented with the District Henry Knox Achievement Medal w/Star “in recognition of strong and determined leadership” of the chapter and William Rozier was presented with the Past President Medal.



—Photos courtesy of Bruce Pickette

SAR Family Plan induction

Compatriot Patrick Little was inducted by President William Kirkland, left, at the April meeting of the Gen. Richard Montgomery chapter. On the occasion of his 92nd birthday, Patrick's father, Richard, was inducted at his Montgomery home later in the month by former President General Bruce Pickette, with Patrick pinning the SAR rosette on his father. Family members were also present to celebrate both Richard's birthday and becoming a member of the SAR. Their applications were submitted under the SAR Family Plan.

Black Warrior River gets spicy promoting chapter

Things got heated up and spicy for the Black Warrior River chapter on Feb. 14 as they participated in the annual "Chili Cookoff" sponsored by the Tuscaloosa Exchange Club.

This year's recipe was compatriot Cade McCool's personal recipe which had a smokie flavor and was very tasty.

"I made close to four gallons and we ran out before the end of the contest," McCool said. Compatriots McCool and Stephen Asbury (chapter president) served up the chili to patrons while compatriot David Jones worked the crowd recruiting and pushing the youth programs.

"I handed out numerous recruiting cards to those who showed an interest along with youth program brochures, which parents were extremely appreciative for an opportunity for their kids to be involved in something patriotic," said Jones. "It was another good opportunity to promote the Sons of the American Revolution within the community."

In addition to having some excellent chili and promoting the SAR, the Black Warrior River chapter won first place in the category "Best Costume." This is the second year in a row winning this honor.

The icing on the cake for the judges was that the uniforms and flag used as a backdrop were all hand made and exact replicas of 18th century uniforms.

— David Jones



—Photo courtesy of David Jones

Black Warrior River chapter compatriots Cade McCool, left, and David Jones.



—Photos courtesy of David Jones

Eagle Scouts presented with certificates and medals by Black Warrior River chapter

On May 19, the Black Warrior River chapter recognized three new Eagle Scouts from Tuscaloosa's Troop 90 as Declan Barksdale (above left), Silvia Roberts (center) and Alden White received the Eagle Scout recognition certificate and the bronze Good Citizenship Medal for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. Troop 90 was introduced to the SAR youth programs at the meeting. Each Eagle Scout was encouraged to complete their applications for the Eagle Scout competition this coming year. All Scouts were encouraged to enter the essay and oration contest as a way to earn additional merit badges.

—Photos courtesy of Jason Dallas

An Honor Guard for the Honor Flight

On April 24, the Wiregrass Minutemen provided a color guard for Operation Homecoming as local veterans returned from a trip to Washington D.C. The Wiregrass Honor Flight honors veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam with a free, one-day trip to Washington D.C. to visit the memorials built in their honor. The mission is simple: To celebrate our heroes with a day of honor, reflection and gratitude. For many veterans, this trip represents a long-overdue "thank you" and a powerful reminder that their service will never be forgotten. The Wiregrass Minutemen included, from left: Jason Dallas, James Crabtree and Phillip Kitchens.



**ALABAMA SOCIETY, SONS OF
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALSSAR

3104 Cabot Street Phone: 334-328-4580
Montgomery, AL 36110 E-mail: timgaylesar@gmail.com



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Please include your chapter's activities in the next newsletter

If you're submitting material for the next newsletter, please e-mail your pictures and information to timgaylesar@gmail.com or send information about your chapter's activities or upcoming events by June 10 to Tim Gayle at 3104 Cabot Street, Montgomery, AL 36110.



—Photo courtesy of Ron Dains

Dr. John Fulwider presents Southern District Knox Medals to chapter 'movers and shakers'
Southern District Vice President General Dr. John Fulwider, center, is surrounded at the annual business meeting by chapter "Movers and Shakers" for 2025 to whom he presented District-level Knox Medals.