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FPRA Southwest Florida Chapter celebrates members and installs 2026-27 board

Annual celebration honors six members for leadership, professional excellence and service to the community

FORT MYERS, Fla. (Sept. 16, 2026) — The Southwest Florida Chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA) celebrated the accomplishments of its members and installed its 2026-27 board of directors during its annual Chapter Awards celebration on Sept. 15. The event recognized members for outstanding leadership, professional excellence and service to the chapter and Southwest Florida communications community.

“We are here to celebrate the people who make this chapter so special,” said Evelyn Longa, APR, CPRC, 2026-27 chapter president. “This year is about aligning our talents, energy and support for one another so every member walks away having gained something real.”

The chapter presented six awards recognizing members who demonstrated exceptional leadership, professional excellence, service and commitment to the public relations profession.

Gabriella Garcia received the Rising Star Award, which recognizes an emerging chapter leader who demonstrates enthusiasm and passion for the profession. Now in her second year as the chapter’s Website Chair, Garcia has demonstrated dedication, professionalism and a willingness to learn and grow while balancing her career and pursuit of a master’s degree.

Violet Powell received the Pam Nulman Soaring Eagle PR Award, which honors an active FPRA student member who demonstrates exceptional leadership. A communications student at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), Powell has served as president of the FGCU FPRA student chapter for the past two years, building the chapter’s presence on campus while supporting and mentoring fellow students.

Heather Doane, APR, CPRC, received the Unsung Hero Award for her dedication to the chapter and professional development. As the chapter’s Accreditation Chair, Doane has guided members through the process of earning their Accredited in Public Relations (APR) and Certified Public

Relations Counselor (CPRC) credentials while also supporting chapter events and initiatives, including Media Breakfast, all while completing her master's degree and balancing a career.

Nicki McTeague received the Chapter Member of the Year Award for her years of dedicated service, strategic leadership and contributions to the chapter's communications program and the community. Through innovation, collaboration and process improvement in her role as VP of Communications, McTeague has helped modernize member communications and expand the chapter's reach through newsletters, social media, email and a new member texting initiative.

Susan Frantz received the PR Professional of the Year Award, which recognizes a member who exemplifies the high standards of the public relations profession in Southwest Florida. Frantz is a past president of the Southwest Florida Chapter and has served as vice president of communications on the FPRA State Board, and she has received multiple professional honors throughout her career, including recognition as a Gulfshore Business 40 Under 40 honoree.

Lauren Bernaldo, APR, CPRC, received the Friends of Janet Philanthropy Award, which honors the legacy of longtime FPRA member Janet Wilson and recognizes outstanding volunteerism, leadership and community service. During her year as the chapter's president, Bernaldo launched Comms for a Cause, a partnership with United Way that has provided communications support to approximately 40 Southwest Florida nonprofits, and Soaring Connections, which connects FGCU FPRA students with working communications professionals.

The chapter also recognized outgoing president Shannon Williamson, APR, who was named the state's Chapter President of the Year at FPRA's 2026 PR & Comms Summit in August. Williamson will continue serving the chapter as immediate past president.

Longa was installed as president for the 2026-27 term by April Salter, APR, CPRC, state president of the Florida Public Relations Association. Also installed were Gracie Seidel as president-elect; Molly Schweers, APR, as treasurer; Heather Doane, APR, CPRC, as vice president of professional development; Eric Jackson, APR, CPRC, as vice president of membership; Nicki McTeague as vice president of communications; and Lisa Murray, APR, CPRC, as vice president of credentialing.

Longa will lead the chapter under FPRA's 2026-27 statewide theme, "One FPRA, Many Voices," with a focus on fostering an inclusive environment where communications professionals can build connections, develop their skills and share expertise.

The Southwest Florida Chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association was established in 1985 and serves public relations, marketing and communications professionals throughout the region.

For more information about the FPRA Southwest Florida Chapter, visit fpraswfl.org or follow @FPRASWFL on social media.

About the Florida Public Relations Association Southwest Florida Chapter

The Southwest Florida Chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association is a professional organization dedicated to advancing the public relations profession through education, networking and professional development opportunities for communications professionals throughout the region. The association fosters a dynamic and inclusive environment that empowers communications professionals at all levels to achieve mastery through collaboration, continuous learning and shared expertise. For more information, visit FPRAswfl.org.

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