



## The Plank Center

FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Plank Center names its 2026 Milestones in Mentoring Honorees

TUSCALOOSA, Ala., May 26, 2026—The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations will honor five influential public relations professionals at its 16<sup>th</sup> annual Milestones in Mentoring Gala, on Nov. 5, 2026, at the Union League Club of Chicago.

The annual event celebrates leaders whose careers have been defined not only by professional achievement but by their unwavering commitment to developing, sponsoring and mentoring the next generation of communications professionals.

This year's honorees are:

- [Legacy Award](#): Dr. Don W. Stacks, Professor Emeritus of Strategic Communication, University of Miami
- [Agency Award](#): Chris Foster, CEO, Omnicom Public Relations Group
- [John "Jack" Koten Corporate Award](#): Joe Cohen, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, AXIS
- [Bruce K. Berger Educator Award](#): Dr. Matthew W. Ragas, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, DePaul University, College of Communication
- [Emerging Leader Award](#): Sonny Franks Miller, Sr. Manager, Global Corporate Communications, Clarios

"Having recently wrapped up our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at The Plank Center, this 2026 group of Milestones in Mentoring honorees kicks off a new decade in a big way," said Grant Deady, Chair of The Plank Center Board of Advisors and President of Zeno Group U.S. "Never before has mentoring young communications professionals and helping them get their careers off to a fast start been more important and this year's honorees have shown a commitment to that mission throughout their careers."

Over the past 16 years, the Milestones in Mentoring Gala has become one of the communication profession's most meaningful celebrations of leadership through service, collaboration and human connection. The event

highlights the often-unseen impact mentors have in shaping careers, opening doors, building confidence and strengthening the future of the profession.

“This event is made truly special and inspiring by the fact that each honoree is introduced and presented their award by one of their mentees,” Plank Center Director Dr. Karla K. Gower said. “It is a powerful reminder of the deep influence of leadership through mentorship.”

Proceeds from the event support The Plank Center’s mission to develop the next generation of communications leaders through mentorship, education, leadership programming and professional development initiatives, including emerging leader experiences and industry partnerships that help strengthen the future talent pipeline for the profession.

A reception will occur at 5:30 p.m. CDT, preceding the awards ceremony. For more information on the 2026 Milestones in Mentoring Gala, including registration and sponsorship opportunities, visit the Plank Center’s [website](#).

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#### About The Plank Center

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations is committed to empowering and advancing the next generation of emerging leaders in the profession through mentorship, programming, education and fostering meaningful connections. The Center ensures future leaders possess the knowledge, skills, history, ethics and empathy to foster strong relationships between institutions, organizations and the public they serve for mutual benefit. Established at The University of Alabama in 2005, the Center is named in honor of Betsy Plank, the “First Lady of PR.” For more information, please visit [plankcenter.ua.edu](http://plankcenter.ua.edu) and follow our social media channels (@PlankCenterPR).