

Elite Fight Club celebrates martial artists during annual banquet

South Carolina Black Belt Hall of Fame presents several awards during ceremonial dinner

ANDERSON, SC, UNITED STATES, January 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Guests and inductees of the S.C. Black Belt Hall of Fame (SCBBHOF), the Palmetto State's premier martial arts organization, gathered for the Hall of Fame's annual awards dinner at Carson's Steak Warehouse and Saloon in Anderson, S.C., Saturday evening, Jan. 10.

RECOGNIZING MILITARY SERVICE

Among the SCBBHOF inductees receiving awards were Dr. Tom Mullikin, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR); Col. Steve Vitali, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.); and USMC veteran Sam Chapman: Each of whom received the SCBBHOF's Meritorious Military Service Award for 2026. Mullikin is a former U.S. Army officer and a retired commanding general (major general) of the S.C. State Guard. Vitali commanded U.S. and foreign forces in Iraq and Afghanistan during both wars.

ADDITIONAL INDUCTEES RECEIVING AWARDS

In addition to honoring Mullikin, Vitali, and Chapman, the SCBBHOF recognized Inductees Joey Shiflett, Tony Young, and Brian Plempel as "Knights of the Roundtable," honoring martial artists who in their careers have won every major national tournament in which they have fought. The award is the namesake of SCBBHOF Pres. Marty Knight, who has also won every national tournament in which he has fought.

Rounding out the inductee awards were Hall of Famers John Orck and Ray Thompson. Orck



Pictured (L-R) are Grandmaster Bruce Brutschy, SCBBHOF Pres. Marty Knight, Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott, SCDNR Director Tom Mullikin, and Col. Steve Vitali.

received the Keith Vitali Warrior Award, namesake of Hollywood martial-arts star and world champion Keith Vitali (brother of Col. Steve Vitali). Thompson received the "Allen Steen 'Blood and Guts' Award, which bears the name of the late martial arts Grandmaster Allen Steen.

COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Additional award recipients included martial artist Bobby Wiesner who received the Bobby Tucker Courage Award, and Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott, an honorary black belt and longtime friend of the SCBBHOF who received the Hall of Fame's "First through the door" award, an honor recognizing "leadership from the front," according to SCBBHOF Inductee and Grandmaster (10th-degree Black Belt)

Bruce Brutschy. "Leon Lott is the ultimate first-through-the-door combatant by any measure."

Grandmaster Brutschy, who also serves as the SCBBHOF's sergeant at arms, introduced fellow SCBBHOF inductee and SCDNR Director Mullikin who then introduced both Sheriff Lott and Col. Vitali moments before their individual awards were presented.

SCDNR DIRECTOR PAYS TRIBUTE TO SHERIFF

"Tonight we gather to celebrate excellence, service, and legacy—values that lie at the very heart of the South Carolina Black Belt Hall of Fame," said Mullikin, who serves as the SCBBHOF's vice president. "This institution exists to honor individuals whose lives reflect courage, commitment, and an unwavering dedication to the people they serve. It is in that spirit that we recognize Sheriff Leon Lott."

Mullikin added: "Sheriff Lott's career in law enforcement spans decades, but his impact reaches far beyond titles or tenure. He has served not simply as a sheriff, but as a guardian of public trust, a reformer in moments that demanded courage, and a leader who understands that true public safety is built on relationships, integrity, and accountability."

In addition to serving as Sheriff of Richland County, Lott serves as the two-star commanding general of the S.C. State Guard, the post held by Mullikin until Dec. 2018.



STRONG MIND, HEART, AND BODY

“This to me is one of the highest honors I could receive,” said Lott accepting his award. “It is because all of those standing here tonight wearing the gold tie and [SCBBHOF] blazer, believe exactly what I believe: That is in having [and developing] a strong mind, heart, and body.”

Though officially established in 2012, the formative years of the S.C. Black Belt Hall of Fame stretch back to the 1970s when founders like Keith Vitali, Mike Genova, Bobby Tucker, and Bruce Brutschy were gaining state, regional, and national recognition as martial arts tournament fighters and Karate instructors.

Pictured (L-R) are Grandmaster Bruce Brutschy, SCBBHOF Pres. Marty Knight, Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott, SCDNR Director Tom Mullikin, and Col. Steve Vitali.

W. Thomas Smith Jr.
S.C. Black Belt Hall of Fame
[email us here](#)

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