

# Furman University's prestigious Riley Institute recognizes 12 Fellows

*Three of the 12 were among MidlandsBiz's sixty most influential military leaders*

COLUMBIA, SC, UNITED STATES, February 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Riley Institute at Furman University recognized 12 Fellows in the Institute's February 2026 "Fellows in the News." Among those recognized were Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott, former State Representative James E. Smith Jr., and Brig. Gen. Darlene Marie Goff.

All three were acknowledged as being among 60 of South Carolina's most influential military leaders, as recognized and "celebrated" by MidlandsBiz during Veterans Month, Nov. 2025 [See – <https://whosonthemove.com/celebrating-60-of-south-carolinas-most-influential-military-leaders/>].

Lott, who in addition to serving as sheriff of Richland County serves as commanding general (major general) of the S.C. State Guard (state defense force militia), was the National Sheriff's Association National Sheriff of the Year in 2021. Lott also serves as president of the Fort-Jackson Palmetto State Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army. In 2010, Lott traveled to Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government to help that war-torn country establish its first-ever female police academy. He is a member of the Fort Jackson Hall of Fame, and he is a S.C. Military Veterans Hall of Fame inductee (Class of 2025).

Smith, the current city attorney for the City of Cayce, S.C., is a S.C. Army National Guard officer and former U.S. Army Reserve (Infantry) officer. He served in Afghanistan and holds the rank of



Pictured (L-R) are Lt. Col. James E. Smith Jr., Sheriff (Maj. Gen.) Leon Lott, and Brig. Gen. Marie Goff.



The Richard W. Riley Institute at Furman University is the namesake of Richard Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education and former two-term governor of South Carolina.

lieutenant colonel. A former member of the S.C. House of Representatives, he too is a S.C. Military Veterans Hall of Fame inductee (Class of 2025).

Goff, a retired S.C. Army National Guard brigadier general is the first female general officer in the S.C. National Guard and an accomplished post-military global travel writer. Goff is a recent nominee for induction in the S.C. Military Veterans Hall of Fame.

The Riley Institute recognized other Fellows including Shawn Bell, city administrator for the City of Fountain Inn; Elise Partin, mayor of the City of Cayce; David Platts, executive director of the South Carolina Arts Commission; Mike Sarvis, recently appointed chair-elect of the Greenville Chamber board of directors for 2027; Steve Spinks, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce's 2025 Business Leader of the Year; Chito Walker Charleston police chief; and Knox White, mayor of the City of Greenville.

The Institute also mentioned the Community Foundation of Greenville and TOWN Magazine naming recipients of the 2025 Charitable Giving Awards, including Katy Pugh Smith, Damon Qualls, and Knox White.

Founded in 1999, The Richard W. Riley Institute at Furman University, is a non-partisan organization which aims to advance social and economic progress in South Carolina and beyond. The Institute is the namesake of Richard Riley, a former U.S. Navy officer, Furman alumnus, former U.S. Secretary of Education and former governor of South Carolina.

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