A CONSTITUTIONAL SPEECH CONTEST

2026-2027

H. W. DARE MANESS HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER: Jack Lonergan

DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT: Nick Diener

AMERICANISM COMMISSION CHAIRMAN:
Jerome Childs

ORATORICAL PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Bob Scherer, *Chairman*
Jim Hill, *Semi-Final # One*
Joe Roberts, *Semi-Final # Two*
Sybil Davis-Highdale, *Semi-Final # Three*
Mark Dorsey, *Semi-Final # Four*

THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Updated July 2026

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2027 Contest Dates

- Post Contests must be completed by..... **January 30, 2027, Saturday**
- Semi-Final Contests will be held on ..... **February 13, 2027, Saturday**

Location #1 **Time: 10:00am** TBD **Contact**: Jim Hill, 803-448-5417, usmc1969@gmail.com	**Location #2** **Time: 10:00am** Greenwood County Veterans Center 106 Main Street North Greenwood, SC 29626 **Contact**: Joe Roberts, 443-306-4614, dirobja@verizon.net
Location #3 **Time: 10:00am** Lugoff Post 195 534 Wildwood Lane Lugoff, SC 29078 **Contact**: Sybil Davis-Highdale, 803-236-3288, sybil.alpost175@hotmail.com	**Location #4** **Time: 1:00pm** TBD **Contact**: Mark Dorsey, 843-812-1783, dorseyma@hotmail.com
For Additional Program Information Contact: **Bob Scherer, Chairman, 828-292-6031, rdscherer@ymail.com**	

- SC Department Contest will be on ……..... **March 6, 2027, Saturday**
  - St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 1715 Bull St., Columbia, SC 29201
- National Finals will be held …….....**May 14 - May 16, 2027**
  - Hillsdale College, 33 E. College St., Hillsdale, Michigan 49242

General Information

The purpose of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program "A Constitutional Speech Contest" is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States on the part of high school students. Other objectives of the contest include the development of leadership, the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and the preparation for acceptance of the duties and responsibilities, the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

Semi-Final Scholarships

All Semi-Final scholarships must be used within five years of graduation from high school.
1st Place Award - $1,000.00 2nd Place Award - $500.00

Both 1st & 2nd Place winner Certification Forms along with copies of their speeches must be submitted to the Oratorical Committee Person overseeing the Semi-Final Location to be forwarded to the SC Department immediately following the contest.

Department Scholarships

All Department scholarships must be used within five years of graduation from high school.
1st Place - $2,500.00 **2nd** Place - $1,500.00 **3rd** Place - $750.00 **4th** Place - $750.00

National Scholarships

The winner at the Department level who is certified into and participates in the first round of the national contest will receive a **$2,000.00 National scholarship**.
Each first round winner who advances to and participates in the second round, but does not advance to the final round, will receive an additional **$2,000.00 scholarship** to pursue education at any college or university in the United States.

National scholarship awards are presented to the three finalists in the final round of the National Contest as follows: 1st place - $25,000.00 2nd place - $22,500.00 3rd place - $20,000.00

A contestant must give both their prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse to receive the scholarship.

Rule 1: Eligibility

Eligible participants must be **citizens of or lawful permanent residents** of the United States. All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of 20 years on the date of the national contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or home school). The curriculum of the school must be considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade 9 and terminating with grade 12. Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest. Contestants must either be legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the Department that they enter competition. Contestants can enter competition through only one Post, Semi-Final, and Department.

High school students that graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete if they are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the Department finals contest.

For each contest in which a contestant participates, an entrance/certification form supplied by the Post commander of the local American Legion Post and a second portion of such form to be signed by the high school principal attesting to the fact that the student is a regularly enrolled member of the ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grades of that particular school will be submitted to the contest chairman. The three finalists of the National Contest will be ineligible for further participation at any level.

Rule 2: The Prepared Oration

The prepared oration must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The same subject and oration used in the Department contest must be used in the National Contest. The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than eight (8) minutes or more than ten (10) minutes for delivery. It must be delivered in the English language.

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room. They may consult the copy of their prepared oration, until they exit the holding room in order to begin the contest, at which time the copy of the prepared oration will be surrendered to the contest official who is monitoring the first holding room.

In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than ten words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally. The singing of a song(s) is not permitted and will result in the immediate disqualification of the contestant. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made.

The penalty for plagiarism will be disqualification.

Rule 3: Assigned Topic

The assigned topic discourse must not consume less than three (3) minutes or more than five (5) minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution.

The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five (5) minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some phase of the Constitution of the United States, selected from Articles and Sections as listed under assigned topics for the current year's contest in this brochure.

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on the same assigned topic.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic in order to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. It is to be understood that the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in the English language.

Rule 4: Assigned Topics for 2027

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

The Preamble
We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article VI Paragraph 2
This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

Amendment XIV Section 3
No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Amendment XXII Section 1
No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once. But this Article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this Article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this Article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.

Rule 5: Dress

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is to be worn by all contestants. Contestants are not permitted to wear awards and medals from previous competitions.

Rule 6: Travel

Expenses of entrants must be borne by the sponsoring American Legion Post in the Semi-Final and Department contests. The national organization of The American Legion will pay travel costs of the Department winner and their chaperone to the National competition. The Department winner must be accompanied by a chaperone over 21 years of age.

The American Legion does not assume liability for personal injury, property damage or loss sustained by any contestant or chaperone en route to or from the contest; however, The American Legion does carry a nominal group accident insurance policy on contestants accepted into the National competition. The American Legion selects an air carrier for contestants' travel.

Rule 7: TV and Radio

Live television and radio broadcasts are permitted in all contests, as well as filming, taping or other types of media for later showing, provided:

1. Lighting and other site conditions are the same for all contestants.
2. Filming or broadcasts in no way distract the contestants or interfere with the pre-announced scheduled time of the contest.
3. The normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium.
4. The American Legion is in no way financially obligated without prior approval.
5. Satisfactory arrangements are made in advance with the contest official.

Rule 8: Contest Regulations

As the program is of an educational nature, participating Posts are urged to open the contest to the general public without admission charges and without the conducting of any sales offer or fund-raising program in connection with such contest. The name of the contestants may be released to the press for publicity purposes in advance of the contest, but the release of photographs or interviews in advance of the contest is not permitted.

All contestants must be prepared to deliver their written oration in duplicate to the chairman or judges upon call. These will be returned except in the case of winners. Substitutions for disqualified contestants or contestants unable to compete for any reason are not permissible.

A drawing shall be held by the official in charge of the contest to determine the order in which the contestants will appear. The contest chairman shall announce the title of the contestant's prepared oration immediately after introducing him/her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. The chairman will request the audience to refrain from applause until the judges have made their decision.

It is assumed that all contests will be conducted in auditoriums having a stage or platform from which contestants will speak; however, the use of notes, amplification, lectern, or speaker's stand is NOT permitted. Props are NOT permitted. **Prompting in any manner will disqualify the contestant in the Department finals. Prompting can be permitted in contests below the Department level.** The use of any type of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is prohibited.

Contestants shall speak in order of drawing. For the prepared oration, each contestant shall speak for at least eight (8) minutes, but not more than ten (10) minutes and for the assigned topic discourse, not less than three (3) minutes or more than five (5) minutes.

In post contests, judges shall render their decision after the delivery of prepared orations. In all other contests, after the delivery of prepared orations, the following shall govern:
Immediately prior to the delivery of the last contestant's prepared oration, a card upon which will be written the actual words of the topic upon which all contestants will base the assigned topic discourse, will be drawn by some individual designated by the chairman, but will not be made known at this time to the contestants or audience members.

Contestants are required to remain in a private room where the discourse of the other speakers cannot be heard until it is their turn to speak (contestants will be under the supervision of an individual appointed by the chairman). As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they must return to a soundproof waiting room. As each speaker concludes his/her assigned topic discourse, they shall not be allowed to associate with contestants who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement and must be escorted to a private holding area.

Approximately five minutes prior to the time of the delivery of the assigned topic discourse, contestant number one will be informed of the topic drawn for the assigned topic discourse and shall be permitted to retire to privacy, under the direction of an individual appointed by the chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that no contestant is permitted to consult any text matter or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he is to speak, other than the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

Each succeeding contestant will be called upon in the order in which he/she previously appeared. He/she shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and shall then be escorted to privacy in the manner as provided for contestant number one.

The chairman will be expected to introduce each contestant by name after the judges have surrendered their score cards and before the winner is announced. Public announcement of the first-place winner only shall be made in the Post contest. The winner and first runner-up will be announced at the Semi-Final contests and at the Department contest.

No deviation is allowed in rules and regulations without consent of the Department chairman.

Rule 9: Tabulators

The contest chairman will appoint no less than two (2) tabulators at the Post contest and three (3) tabulators for the Semi-Final and Department contests. It will be their responsibility to review the judges' scorecards to be certain they are fully tabulated and signed before they are submitted for final tabulations.

Chairperson, judges, tabulators, commanders and other contest officials are not permitted to divulge judges to anyone at the site of the contest. The judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion, Department of South Carolina Headquarters.

Rule 10: Timekeepers

Two official timekeepers shall be named by the chairman whose duty it shall be to keep an accurate time record of each contestant, and they shall be located on the main floor in full view of the contestants. The timekeepers shall begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timekeepers should be equipped with a stopwatch and timecards carrying figures 8, 9 and 10. These cards should be large enough so as to be easily seen by the contestants and when eight minutes have been used, the time warning card with the figure 8 thereon shall be held up followed by 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing figures 3, 4, and 5 during the assigned topic discourse in the Semi-Final and Department contests. The contest chairman shall announce the time consumed by each contestant for the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse immediately after each contestant speaks for the benefit of the judges.

The contest chairman will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point will be deducted for each minute or fraction thereof – over or under the allotted time – shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

Rule 11: Judges

The judges are a very integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications are considered carefully as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and success of the program which results in the selection of a national champion. Good judgment will be exercised to select a well-rounded group of judges and the chairman should provide such judges with a copy of the rules well in advance.

Arrangements for judges will be made by the chairman of <u>each contest</u>. Post contests shall require the services of not fewer than three (3) or more than five (5) judges. Semi-Final and Department contests shall require the services of five (5) judges. Judges' names should not be made public until the conclusion of the contest. During the contest, the judges shall be seated in different locations in the auditorium, and each judge shall render their final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person.

Judges will be advised that a lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse on the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen must result in the judges downgrading the contestant involved. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of ten (10) points for failure to speak on the Constitution.

Following the last assigned topic discourse the judges, timekeeper, tabulators and the contest chairman may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation. **THE DECISION OF THE JUDGES IS FINAL**.

Rule 12: Judging Criteria:

Official score cards will be furnished by the chairman and will be used in all contests. A division will be made on the score card for the maximum number of points each contestant may score for the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse. The manner of scoring and selecting the winner in all contests shall conform to the point schedule shown on the score card. In Post contests it will not be possible to score a breakdown between prepared and assigned topic orations. In this case, the total points will be used as a basis for perfection of the prepared oration alone. Prior to the contest, each judge should have the opportunity to study carefully the criteria for scoring the presentation of the prepared oration and assigned topic discourse by each contestant, the content of oration, and speaking skills. The following items should be considered (see listing of point values on the furnished official score card).

A. CONTENT

1. Originality, freshness, directness, application of knowledge to topic (16 pts)
   Original fresh approach to topic.
   Relevancy to subject.
   Information flows to the audience.
   Speaker stays on topic.
   Originality of "assigned topic" speech

2. Skill in selecting examples, description, analogies, specific data (16 pts)
   Examples applicable, relevant
   Illustrations related to subject
   Adequate information on examples
   Proper credit to quotations or borrowed subject matter
   Utilization of specific data

3. Logic (correctness of inference) (16 pts)

4. Comprehensiveness of knowledge of subject matter (22 pts)
   Plagiarism?
   Speaker's grasp of subject
   Unity of thought or thoughts
   Topic significance
   Overall impression compared to component parts
   Discussion value of "assigned topic" speech
   Informational and educational to audience

B. SPEAKING SKILLS

1. Voice and diction. (10 pts)
   Utilization of proper inflection
   Is the speaker easily understood?
   Proper voice volume for physical conditions
   Articulation
   Enunciation
   Pronunciation

2. Style: language use, word arrangement, transition, word selection. (10 pts)
   Appropriate language use
   Succinct sentences
   Ease of interpretation. Grammar
   Extraneous clauses or phrases?
   Smooth, continuous transition of sentences, paragraphs
   Speech structure: introduction, main body, summary or conclusion

3. Body action: poise, eye contact, posture, gestures (10 pts)
   Is speaker at ease while speaking?
   Establish eye contact.
   Alert nature of posture.
   Is speaker too dramatic?

Rule 13: Post and Semi-Final Contests

POST CONTESTS must be concluded by **Saturday**, **January 30, 2027**. Participants in Post contests may be drawn from one or more high schools in the Post area. This contest will be under the direction and supervision of the Post Commander or representative. Each contestant in Post contests shall present a prepared oration of not less than 8 or more than 10 minutes and such oration must be without the aid of notes, and the original effort of each contestant. Immediately upon conclusion of the Post contest, the Post Commander shall certify the winner to their Oratorical Committee Person assigned to their Semi-Final. The Oratorical Committee Person of each Semi-Final will forward the results to both the Oratorical Chairman and the Dept. of SC. **Post Certification Form (2027) must be completed and turned in to participating Post.**

All SEMI-FINAL CONTESTS will be held on **Saturday, February 13, 2027**. NO exceptions will be allowed (unless there is inclement weather).
All Post winners will participate in their respective Semi-Final Location. In Semi-Final contests and the Department finals, each contestant shall present the prepared oration and in addition will be required to speak on one of the assigned topics drawn, for not less than 3 or more than 5 minutes. This Semi-Final contest will be under the direction and supervision of the Oratorical Committee Chairman and/or assigned Oratorical Committee Person, who will coordinate and plan the Semi-Final contest.

Semi-Final winners and the 1st runner up of each Location #, must be reported by the Oratorical Committee Person in charge to the Department Headquarters immediately following the contest.

Rule 14: Department Contest

The Department contest will be held on **Saturday, March 6, 2027** at **10:00 a.m.** at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 1715 Bull Street, Columbia, SC 29201. (The committee reserves the right to change the date and place).

Rule 15: National Contest

The 2027 National Finals will be **May 14-16, 2027** in Hillsdale, Michigan, at Hillsdale College. The quarterfinal and semifinal contests dates are May 15, 2027.

All contestants and chaperones will arrive the Friday of the contest weekend. All contestants and chaperones will stay on campus at Hillsdale College.

A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants will take place on the Friday evening of the contest weekend. A banquet honoring all contestants will be Sunday afternoon, following the national championship contest.

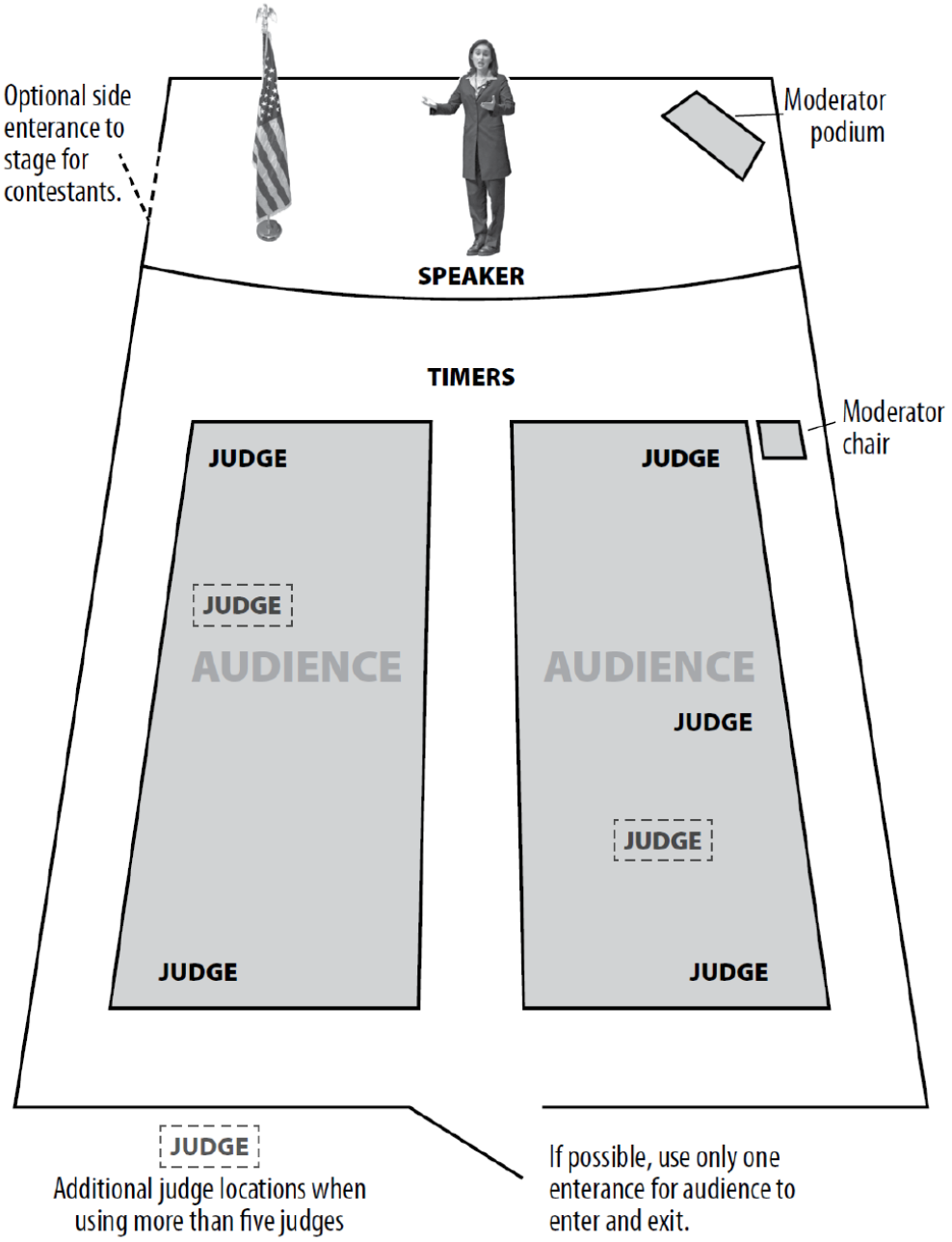
Websites for Important Information

The American Legion Department of South Carolina Programs - Oratorical
https://www.southcarolinalegion.org/oratorical-contest

The American Legion National Oratorical Contest
https://www.legion.org/get-involved/youth-programs/oratorical-contest

2026 - American Legion National Oratorical Contest Finals
https://www.youtube.com/live/VOxDAWnCQB0?si=6ZmmDkRl6sdWoqbm

Contest Floorplan



PREVIOUS WINNERS

*** National Winner** ** National Runner-Up

1939*	**Fletcher Padgett, Jr.**	**Saluda**
1940	Wade Weatherford	Florence
1941	Carolyn Collier	Spartanburg
1942	James L. Walker	Johnston
1943	Allen Watson	Ware Shoals
1944	Freddie Bolonkin	Greenville
1945	James Gowen	Greenville
1946	Tom Kay	Anderson
1947	John D. Long, III	Union
1948	Jane Gerard	Charleston
1949	Richard Garland	Mt. Pleasant
1950	Eugene Brantley	Chester
1951	Herma Hill	Lancaster
1952	Charles King	Easley
1953	Tedi Hoke	Blacksburg
1954	Norman F. McLeod	Dalzell
1955	Nathan Saint-Armand	Gaffney
1956	Broxie Nelson	Chester
1957	Michael Sheheen	Camden
1958	Mike Stein	Greenville
1959	Mike Stein	Greenville
1960	John P. Callahan	Lexington
1961	Jeanette N. Wall	Moncks Corner
1962	Arthur B. Hartzog	Blackville
1963	Frank G. Dunn	Conway
1964	Richard Allen Poole	Lexington
1965	Richard E. Johnson	Nesmith
1966	Violet Harrington	Florence
1967	Johnathan S. Crowe	Rock Hill
1968	Leon Dale Gilbert	Rock Hill
1969	Edward H. Smith	Lancaster
1970	George M. Hearn, Jr.	Rock Hill
1971	Gerald Caskey	Lancaster
1972*	**Thomas W. Joiner**	**Rock Hill**
1973	Michael P. Flanagan	York
1974	William E. Spears, III	Beaufort
1975	William E. Spears, III	Beaufort
1976	Virginia Inman	Greenville
1977	Francis J. Rivers	Rock Hill
1978	Francis J. Rivers	Rock Hill
1979	John J. Hearn	Rock Hill
1980	John P. Roddey	Rock Hill
1981	Richard S. Lackland	West Columbia
1982	Emmette J. Saleeby	Dillon
1983	Sally Boatwright	Columbia
1984	Jeffrey S. Singleton	Florence
1985	Wanda McGuirt	Columbia
1986	David W. Garrison	Orangeburg
1987	David W. Garrison	Orangeburg
1988	Elizabeth Overcamp	Seneca
1989	Danielle P. Williams	Summerville
1990	Melanie Page	Seneca
1991**	Melanie Page	Seneca
1992	Melissa Suarez	Seneca
1993	Warren Bazemore	Irmo
1994	Warren Bazemore	Irmo
1995**	Whitney Jackson	Seneca
1996	Julia Brackett	Fort Mill
1997	Katherine Overcamp	Seneca
1998**	Amanda Jill Bryant	Anderson
1999	Julie Moore	Anderson
2000	Jamie D. Frazier	Moncks Corner
2001	Jamie D. Frazier	Moncks Corner
2002	Jamie D. Frazier	Moncks Corner
2003	Irene Smith	Summerville
2004	Jared T. O. Gorham	York
2005	Andrew C. Cooper	Beaufort
2006	Sarah H. Newman	Camden
2007	Andrew McCumber	Anderson
2008	Anna Lynn Doster	Camden
2009	Lauren Kumler	Greenville
2010*	**Victoria Beth Black**	**Iva**
2011	Joshua Arnold	Seneca
2012	no contest held	
2013	Elizabeth Scannell	Goose Creek
2014	Sarah Jean Foster	Goose Creek
2015	Victoria Nwankudu	Florence
2016	Emily E. Rose	Greenville
2017	Jessica Scannell	Goose Creek
2018	Jessica Scannell	Goose Creek
2019	Jessica Scannell	Goose Creek
2020	Isaac Jansen	Greenville
2021	William Sander	Fort Mill
2022	William Sander	Fort Mill
2023	Hank Overbay	Columbia
2024	Iassac Kanagy	Walhalla
2025	Josiah Osborne	Ridgeville
2026	Eliana Oliver	Harleyville