



The Bartender of the Year Competition presented by the Alabama Restaurant & Hospitality Association, Old Forester and United Distributors of AL will begin with four regional competitions. Contests are open to all professional bartenders in the state. Contestants who finish in first place are recognized as that region/city Bartender of the Year, and are entered to compete for the title of State Bartender of the Year. Regional competitions will be held in Huntsville, Birmingham, Orange Beach and Montgomery beginning in October. **Regional winners will compete during the reception of the Stars of the Industry Awards Dinner at the Grand Bohemian Mountain Brook on Monday, November 2, 2026.**

General Guidelines

- The sponsor will supply the Old Forester for the competition. Contestants can bring other spirits, mixers, and garnishes, or specialty ice but **drinks must contain at least 1.5 ounces of an Old Forester Whiskey Row expression (1870, 1897, 1910, 1920), 86 or 100.** The host venue will supply “rocks” glasses and cocktail glasses, but contestants may bring their own glassware if they prefer.
- Contestants will have adequate space in order for them to construct their cocktails. Depending on the venue, this could be either one or two “wells” in a standard bar set up, one or two portable bars as used by many hotels, or standard rectangular draped tables. Bar tools will be provided, but bartenders are welcome to bring their own tools if they prefer.
- All competing bartenders should be present at the host venue one hour prior to the start of the contest.
- Competition order will be determined and representatives will review contest rules with the contestants.

Competition Format

- Contestants will submit an original cocktail that showcases their skill as a bartender and highlights one of the Old Forester Whiskey Row expressions (1870, 1897, 1910, 1920), 86 or 100. The cocktail needs to represent the unique flavors of the state of Alabama or the city in which you are competing. If selected to compete, this cocktail will need to be batched and sampled to guests during the cocktail hour of the competition for a chance to win the People’s Choice award.
- Contestants will prepare their original cocktail for the three judges containing at least 1.5 ounces of an Old Forester Whiskey Row expression (1870, 1897, 1910, 1920), 86 or 100.
- Contestants will have 8 minutes to prepare and present an original cocktail to the judges.
- Three judges will score each participant. You are required to make a drink for each judge. Judging criteria will be based on creativity and uniqueness of your cocktail, technique, appearance, taste, intelligent use of Old Forester brand, time management and presentation.

For questions, email Shea Perkins at sperkins@arhaonline.com or Jill Calhoun at jcalhoun@udiala.com.