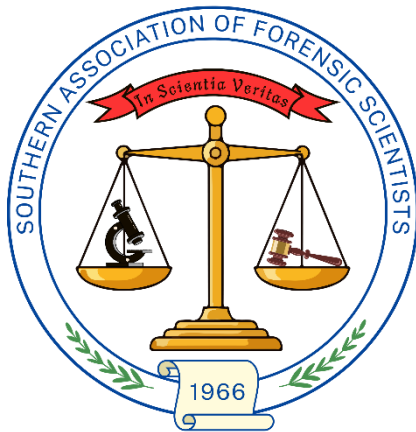
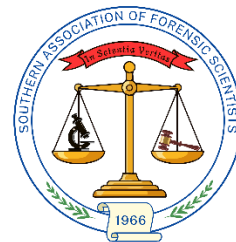


# Southern Association of Forensic Scientists



Annual Meeting 2026  
Greenville, SC

Insert welcome letter from mayor



Welcome to beautiful Greenville and the 2026 Southern Association of Forensic Scientists Annual Training Seminar and Business Meeting. We are glad that you were able to join us for this great event.

I want to thank you for taking an interest in SAFS and for supporting our Annual Training Meeting. Since 1966, the Southern Association of Forensic Scientists has provided its members and the forensic community with valuable training and networking opportunities. This meeting is another example of our commitment to continuing education and information sharing among forensic science professionals. I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss problems and share success stories with your fellow scientists.

I would like to thank our Planning Committee members: Allison Galassie, April Brown, Rachael Looney, Amanda Venable and Collin Shuford for their dedication and the hard work that they have put into making this meeting a huge success. Hosting a meeting this size takes a tremendous amount of work and planning. They have done a great job of organizing workshops and social events that will make this meeting memorable. Also, I would like to extend a special thank you to our vendors that helped make this meeting possible.

I also want to recognize our vendors. Their support helps make this event possible and keeps us equipped with the tools we rely on every day. Please take time to visit them, learn something new, and remind them how much we appreciate them—bonus points if you don't only stop by for the free pens.

As my time as President of SAFS draws to a close, I would like to challenge each of you to get involved in SAFS by volunteering your time and talents. SAFS offers numerous opportunities to volunteer through meeting planning, committee work, special projects and participation in training. Our organization is only as strong and valuable as the commitment of those that contribute to its success.

If you have any questions about SAFS, please feel free to contact myself or one of the Board members.

Enjoy your stay in Greenville. I hope you leave here energized, connected, and inspired—and ready to join us again in 2027 on Hilton Head Island.

Thanks so much!

Tanja Kopp,

SAFS President 2025-2026



# Clinical Research and Forensics Toxicology

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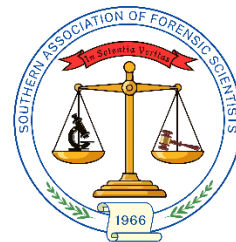
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Fellow Forensic Scientists,

Welcome to Greenville and the 2026 SAFS Annual Meeting!

Happy 60<sup>th</sup> SAFS!! We are excited that you have joined us for this special anniversary meeting in Greenville. The Program Committee has worked very hard to put together an educational and fun program for you. It is our hope that you take full advantage of available workshops, vendor exhibits, and social hours to share information with fellow forensic scientists.

We would like to extend a special thank you to our vendors who helped make this meeting possible. Their information can be found throughout this program. Please be sure to visit the vendors and let them know how much we appreciate their attendance and support.

If you have free time during the week, please visit downtown Greenville where there is a beautiful waterfall park right in the center. If you are athletically inclined, we would also suggest checking out the Swamp Rabbit trail.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let us know. We are happy to help. If you have suggestions for future workshops you'd like to see or would like to be more involved, please reach out!

Your 2026 meeting organizers,

Allison Galassie

April Brown

Rachael Looney

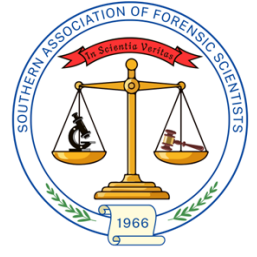
Collin Shuford

Amanda Venable



# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING

## General Information



Meeting information, including this 2026 Annual Meeting Program, can be found on our website: [safsanualmeeting.com](http://safsanualmeeting.com) or by accessing the QR code below:



For your convenience, enclosed in this program, you will find the agenda, a map of the hotel meeting space, and all presentation information.

Inside your welcome bag you will find:

- Tickets for door prizes: winners announced at the vendor reception and banquet; you must be present to win!
- Informational flyers from some of our exhibitors
- A bingo card to have “dabbed” Wednesday night by our vendors. Return your card to the front table to receive a raffle ticket for our drawings at the banquet – you must be present to win!
- Maps of Greenville and information booklets
- Discount coupons
- Other goodies!

Please wear your name badge during all meeting events, including the TopGolf outing, the vendor reception, banquet with cocktail hour, and hospitality suite to ensure entry.

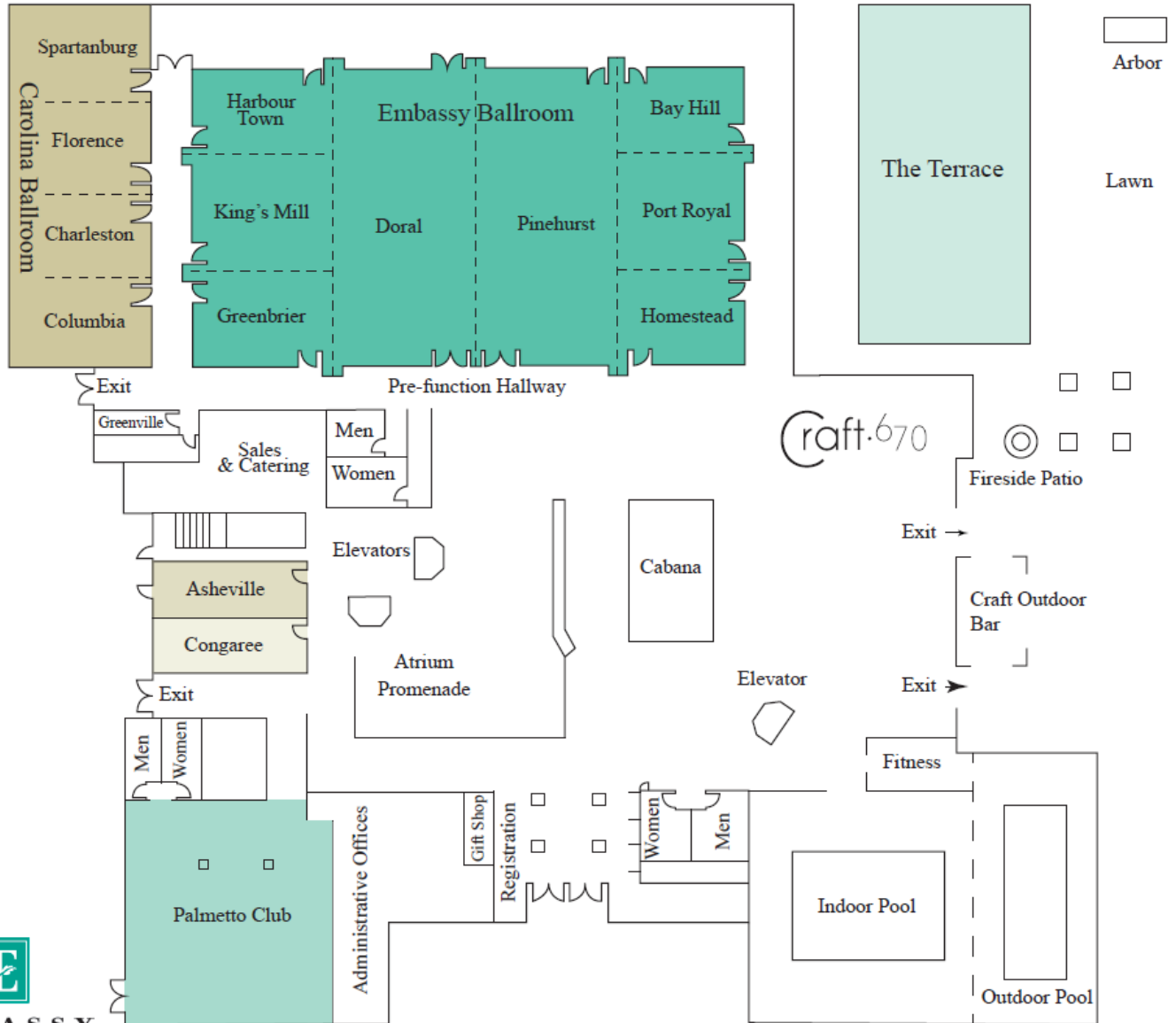
Please join us Thursday for our business meeting – anyone can attend – you do not have to be a member of SAFS. Those that attend will receive a bonus raffle ticket!

Workshop and Meeting Attendance Certificates will be emailed after the completion of the meeting, no later than May 1.

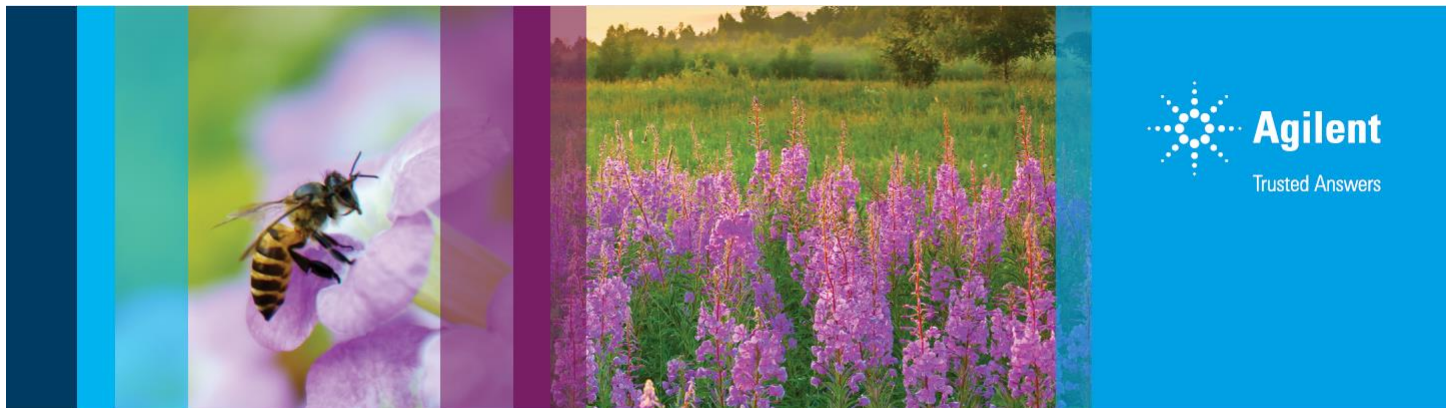
Enjoy your visit to Greenville!



# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING Hotel Meeting Space Layout



670 Verdae Blvd, Greenville, SC 29607  
embassysuitesgreenville.com  
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# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING Agenda



**Monday April 13, 2026**

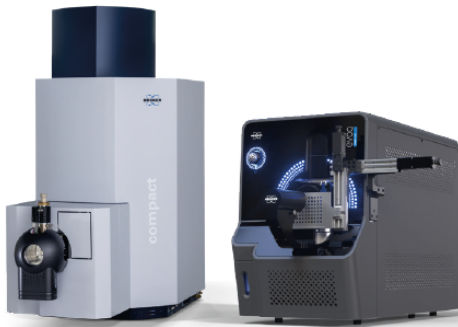
3:30 pm – 6:30 pm Prefunction Tile Area	<b>Registration</b>
4:30 pm – 6:00 pm Greenville Boardroom	<b>SAFS Board Meeting</b>
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm Terrace	<b>Informal Welcome Event</b> *Bring your Embassy Suites complimentary drink tickets to the Terrace and join us for a welcome party! We will have the eats and treats covered!
8:00 pm – 10:00 pm 203 Boardroom Parlor/Fireside Patio	<b>Hospitality Suite</b>



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# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING Agenda



**Tuesday April 14, 2026**

7:00 am – 5:00 pm Prefunction Tile Area	<b>Registration</b> <b>(Closed from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)</b>
8:00 am – 12:00 pm Greenbrier  Doral  King's Mill  Harbour Town	<b>Intro to Writing Agilent Macros</b>  <b>Building Emotional Resiliency for Forensic Professionals: Thriving in High-Stress Environments</b>  <b>Drawing the Line: Forensic Strategies for Hemp and Marijuana Differentiation</b>  <b>Automatic DNA Extraction Strategies for Sexual Assault and Missing Persons Casework</b>
10:00 am – 10:30 am Prefunction Grand Ballroom	<b>Break Sponsored by ASAP Analytical</b>
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Atrium-Promenade	<b>Lunch</b>
1:00 pm – 5:00 pm Greenbrier  Doral  King's Mill	<b>Intro to Writing Agilent Macros</b>  <b>Strengthening Resilience Through Constructive Feedback and Healthy Boundaries</b>  <b>From Seizure to Insight: A Story of Implementation and Training of the RADIAN ASAP</b>
3:00 pm – 3:30 pm Prefunction Grand Ballroom	<b>Break Sponsored by Waters</b>
6:30 pm – 9:00 pm TopGolf (201 Clifton Ct)	<b>Offsite Networking Event</b> (Meet in the lobby around 6 pm to coordinate carpooling!)
9:15 pm – 11:30 pm 203 Boardroom Parlor/Fireside Patio	<b>Hospitality Suite</b>



# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING Agenda



**Wednesday April 15, 2026**

7:00 am – 5:00 pm Prefunction Tile Area	<b>Registration (Closed from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)</b>
8:00 am – 12:00 pm Doral  Greenbrier  King’s Mill  Harbour Town	<b>Sampling in Seized-Drug Laboratories  MassHunter Unknowns and Qualitative Workflows for Forensic Data Analysis  Steady on the Stand – Effective Expert Testimony  Improving DNA Reporting and Communication: Takeaways from the Human Factors Report</b>
10:00 am – 10:30 am Prefunction Grand Ballroom	<b>Break Sponsored by Shimadzu</b>
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Atrium-Promenade	<b>Lunch</b>
1:00 pm – 5:00 pm Doral  Greenbrier  King’s Mill  Harbour Town	<b>Sampling in Seized-Drug Laboratories  MassHunter Unknowns and Qualitative Workflows for Forensic Data Analysis  Introduction to Accreditation and Quality Investigations for the Working Scientist  New DNA Technology for 2026 and Beyond</b>
3:00 pm – 3:30 pm Prefunction Grand Ballroom	<b>Break Sponsored by Agilent</b>
6:30 pm – 9:00 pm Palmetto Club	<b>Vendor Sponsored Reception</b>
9:00 pm – 11:30 pm 203 Boardroom Parlor/Fireside Patio	<b>Hospitality Suite Sponsored by DNA Labs International, Inc</b>



# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING Agenda



## Thursday April 16, 2026

7:00 am – 8:30 am *Vendor spotlight ~7:30 am Atrium-Promenade	<b>Breakfast with Vendors</b>
8:30 am – 12:00 pm Doral	<b>Plenary Session:</b> <b>Kenny Kinsey and Creighton Waters discuss their involvement in the Alex Murdaugh trial</b>
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Atrium-Promenade	<b>Lunch</b>
1:30 pm – 3:00 pm Doral	<b>SAFS Business Meeting</b>
6:30 pm – 7:30 pm Palmetto Club	<b>Cocktails and Hors d'oeuvres</b>
7:30 pm - 10:00 pm Palmetto Club	<b>Banquet</b> *Wear your best golf attire and join us for SAFS 60 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Party! Enjoy a live DJ and 360-degree photo booth!
10:00 pm – 11:30 pm 203 Boardroom Parlor/Fireside Patio	<b>Hospitality Suite</b>

## Friday April 17, 2026

9:00 am – 12:00 pm  Doral   King's Mill   Greenbrier	<b>Discipline Specific Breakout Sessions</b>  <b>Chemistry/Toxicology</b> SWGDRUG/OSAC/ASTM Updates – Melissa Hehir and Lyndsay Cone New Emerging Semi-Synthetic Mitragynoids and their Analytical Challenges – Holly Pierzynski  <b>Biology</b> DNA and Firearms – Mandi S. Van Buren, DNA Labs International, Inc  <b>General Forensics</b>
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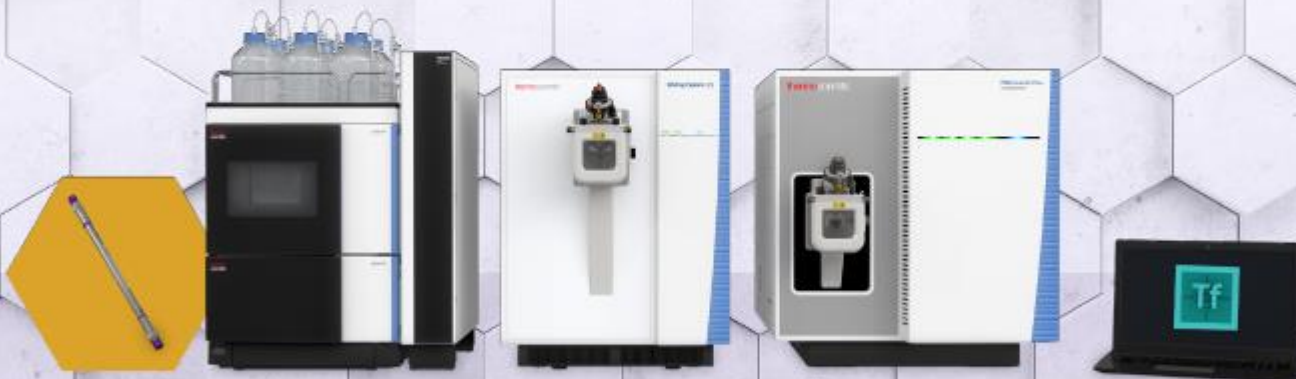
Toxicology

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# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING

## Plenary Session



## An Inside Look of the Alex Murdaugh Trial

### Creighton Waters

Senior Assistant Deputy Attorney General Creighton Waters has been prosecuting criminals in the Attorney General's office his entire legal career. Following a decade primarily handing appeals against defendants convicted of murder, Waters moved to the AG Office's Criminal Prosecution in 2010 and has served as Chief Attorney of the State Grand Jury Division since 2017. There, Waters partnered with SLED, state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies to lead prosecutions and investigations not only in corruption cases against all types of government officials, but also against drug traffickers and gang members. In 2023, Waters was the lead prosecutor in convicting prominent lawyer Alex Murdaugh for a double murder, while also leading the investigation, indictment, and conviction of Murdaugh and co-conspirators of hundreds of offenses for allegedly stealing money from clients and abusing the judicial system for over a decade. Waters also continues to focus on convicting traffickers causing the opioid and methamphetamine epidemic affecting all South Carolinians, while also addressing complex white collar crime and public corruption. Waters serves as an Adjunct Professor teaching advocacy at the University of South Carolina School of Law. Waters is a lifelong resident of South Carolina who graduated from Dreher High School, the University of South Carolina, and the USC School of Law.

### Kenny Kinsey

Kinsey is the owner and Chief Operator of Kenny Kinsey & Assoc. L.L.C., where he offers his experience of the Crime Scene Disciplines, Shooting Reconstruction, Law Enforcement Use of Force, Policy Administration, and various other civil and criminal matters. Dr. Kinsey recognizes the many flaws but truly believes in the American legal system. He is quick to explain the threshold for "beyond a reasonable doubt", and the separation of powers that are the cornerstone of our great country. He is an advocate for community policing and tries in every situation to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the communities that they serve.

After graduating from Orangeburg Wilkinson High School, he received a scholarship to Clemson University where he graduated in 1991 with a BS in PRTM with an emphasis in Resource Management. After a year in the private sector, he accepted a volunteer position with the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) as a reserve Deputy Sheriff. Accepting a full-time position in 1993, he was promoted through the ranks of Patrol Sergeant, Investigator, Investigative Sergeant, and Investigative Lieutenant. In 1998 Kenny was assigned to Special Operations where he assumed command of the SWAT team. After completing over 2000 hours of advanced training, Kenny began a twenty-two-year crime scene career that included being internationally certified through the International Association for Identification (IAI) and has processed over 850 death scenes in various capacities. Kenny has qualified in Summary, General Sessions, and U.S. District Court as an expert witness approximately 80 times in the crime scene related disciplines, including crime scene processing, latent fingerprint identification, blood stain pattern analysis, tire track/ footwear identification, and crime scene reconstruction.

Kenny has worked as a Special Agent at the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), Investigator for the First Judicial Circuit, Major of Administration (OCSO), Chief of Staff, and finally, the Chief Deputy of the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office. Kenny earned an MS in Criminal Justice in 2011 from Troy University, and a Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD.) from Walden University in 2019. Kenny was hired by Claflin University in 2012 as an Adjunct Professor of Criminal Justice, teaching undergraduate/graduate classes in Crime Scene Investigation, Community Policing, Civil Liberties, Justice Administration, Criminal Investigation, and Mental Health in Criminal Justice.

Chief Kinsey has been married to Teresa "Dee Dee" Kinsey for over 20 years and they are the parents of two children. Chief Kinsey is an avid supporter of law enforcement but is deeply driven to help those who have been wronged by bad actors in the criminal justice system. Kinsey has been a certified pistol and rifle instructor for nearly 20 years and has been a tactical operator for most of his career. He previously served as a member of the Salvation Army advisory board of directors, and the Orangeburg County Chamber of Commerce.

Chief Kinsey's love of hunting and fishing is only superseded by his adoration and love for family and friends.



## Powerful, Rugged Platforms for Forensic Toxicology Analysis

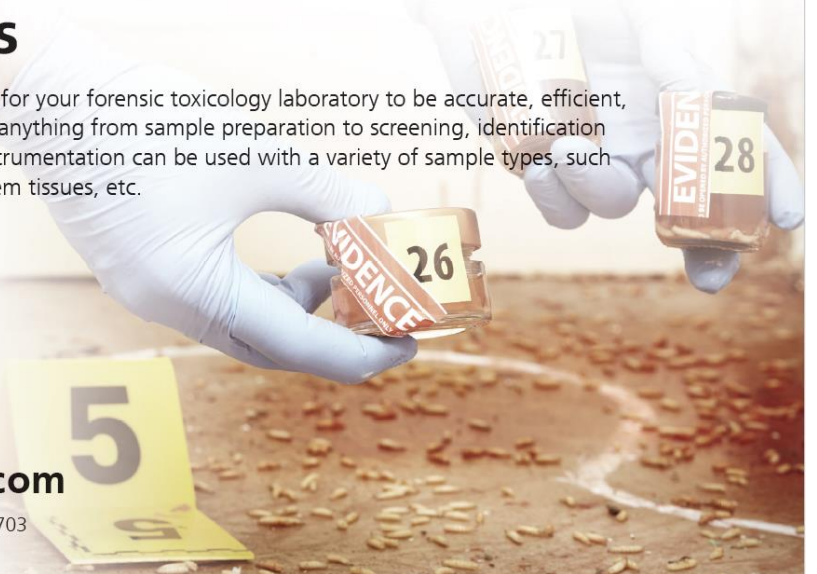
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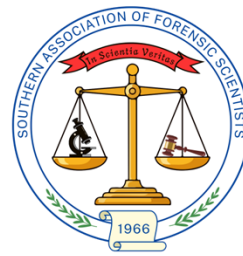
Shimadzu, 1 T.W. Alexander Drive, Suite 100, Durham, NC 27703





# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING

## Workshop Abstracts



### **MassHunter Unknowns and Qualitative Workflows for Forensic Data Analysis**

Dr. Kirk Lokits – GCMS Applications Scientist - Agilent Technologies

The full day workshop is designed to introduce and train the audience in the workflows involved when using Unknowns Analysis in the MassHunter software. The workshop begins with a 20-minute slide presentation explaining the deconvolution process, differences between deconvolution and peak integration, and some of the variables involved when using this powerful data analysis tool. Multiple exercises, using forensic data, will illustrate how to translate established workflows within MSD ChemStation Data Analysis to MassHunter Unknowns Analysis. The workshop will include how to generate an in-house library, how to link retention time and or retention indices to each library entry and apply these entries to increase your Library Match Score (LMS) confidence level. Examples of Unknowns Analysis reporting templates will be demonstrated from the workshop exercises. Qualitative Analysis software will also be introduced utilizing forensic data performing manual data analysis, background subtraction, and library searches. 16 laptops with MassHunter software and forensic data will be provided through this hands-on learning workshop. Additional students can be added, if the students provide their own laptops with MassHunter Qual & Quant software already loaded. Forensic data can be loaded the morning of the course.

### **Intro to Writing Agilent Macros**

Josh Williams – Montana State Crime Lab

Attendees will learn the fundamentals of writing an Agilent macro for ChemStation Data Analysis, including variables, commands, functions, troubleshooting, and creating custom printouts.

### **Sampling in Seized-Drug Laboratories**

Dr. Sandra Rodriguez-Cruz – Senior Research Chemist - DEA Special Testing and Research Laboratory

This workshop will take participants – both novice and experienced – from fearing the ‘s-word’ to feeling comfortable testifying about and defending laboratory sampling procedures! The full-day agenda is divided into six parts. Part 1 will cover sampling terminology, the different types of samplings applicable to drug laboratories, the benefits and costs of sampling, and a historical perspective of sampling in the DEA laboratory system. In Part 2, the concept of ‘making inferences’ will be examined, along with discussions about confidence intervals, hypothesis testing, confidence level, numerical vs categorical variables, sampling distributions, population evaluations, and statistical vs non-statistical methods. In Part 3 we’ll take a deep dive into the math behind the routinely used sampling tables, including an opportunity for hands-on calculations and use of the ENFSI-DWG Sampling Calculator. Part 4 of the workshop will briefly take participants through SWGDRUG’s Supplemental Document #6 and its associated SWGDRUG SD-6 Sampling Calculator which combines hypergeometric sampling statistics with jurisdictional weight-thresholds scenarios. Part 5 will cover the world of negative results and the options available to analysts when these scenarios are encountered, including use of a new statistical sampling

app developed by NIST and Maryland State Police (MSP). To close the day, Part 6 will bring it all together to discuss recommendations for court testimony preparation, potential questions (and answers), useful and relatable analogies, among others. NOTE: Attendees are welcome to bring examples of past casework sampling scenarios and a laptop (if desired) for use during the hands-on exercises.

### **Drawing the Line: Forensic Strategies for Hemp and Marijuana Differentiation**

Amanda Andrews – Forensic Continuous Improvement/Technical Manager – NMS Labs

As the legal landscape surrounding cannabis continues to evolve, forensic laboratories face increasing analytical and interpretive challenges in distinguishing hemp from marijuana. This workshop explores the scientific, legal, and practical aspects of cannabinoid analysis within forensic drug chemistry. Participants will examine method development considerations—including sample preparation for various matrices, decision-point versus quantitative approaches, uncertainty of measurement, and handling of cannabinoid conversion issues. Discussion will also address best practices for clear and defensible reporting, courtroom testimony, and strategies to navigate emerging legislative and analytical developments. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in cannabis differentiation and actionable insights to enhance laboratory practices and communication.

### **Introduction to Accreditation and Quality Investigations for the Working Scientist**

Timothy Suggs – Assistant Director/Quality Manager – NC State Crime Lab

This workshop will give an overview of accreditation and quality investigations. A brief overview of the history of accreditation will be presented followed by a review of the two standards currently used to accredit laboratories. The workshop then will dive into quality investigations. The following investigations will be covered: actions taken to address risks or opportunities, complaints, and non-conforming work and corrective actions. Tools used to assist in quality investigations will be covered. Attendees will be given the opportunity to investigate issues encountered in forensic examinations and apply the skills covered in the workshop.

### **New DNA Technology for 2026 and Beyond**

Tarah Nieroda – Senior DNA Analyst – DNA Labs International

Marybeth Sciarretta – Senior DNA Analyst and QA Manager – DNA Labs International

This workshop will explore the latest advancements in forensic DNA technologies and their transformative impact on evidence interpretation and case outcomes. Emerging and evolving methods – such as fired casing DNA collection and processing, the M-Vac wet-vacuum system, probabilistic genotyping with STRmix™, next-generation sequencing (NGS) including SNP to SNP analysis, and forensic investigative genetic genealogy – are redefining what is possible in forensic investigations. Additional topics will include DNA recovery from degraded bones and tissues and kinship applications. Enhancements to bioinformatics pipelines for SNP analysis, laboratory information management systems, and the onset of artificial intelligence (AI) to assist the examiner from a software perspective will be covered.

Participants will gain an in-depth understanding of these techniques, including their scientific principles, limitations, and challenges, as well as their advantages, successes, and courtroom admissibility. Real-world case studies will illustrate how these technologies have been effectively applied. The workshop will also highlight how recent innovations enable the re-examination of previously tested or inconclusive evidence, offering new opportunities for resolution in cold and complex cases.

## **From Seizure to Insight: A Story of Implementation and Training of the RADIANT ASAP**

Ciara Pitman, Ph.D. – Clinical and Forensic Account Manager – Waters

Melissa Fogarty – Director of Laboratory Operations - CSFRE

Improving screening for seized drugs and the need to monitor drug trafficking is a continuous global effort. It is crucial to implement best practices to conduct thorough screenings and to ensure timely results for public safety. Partnered with the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE), the Colombo Project sponsored a mission to equip laboratories with the tools and training to detect illicit drugs quickly and accurately with a focus on spotting new and emerging substances. With the CFSRE, scientists from Waters assisted in the education and training of utilizing the RADIANT ASAP for presumptive screening of seized drugs.

Rapid Direct Analysis Atmospheric Pressure Solids Analysis Probe (RADIANT™ ASAP) Mass Spectrometry, a class B SWGDRUG technique, provides rapid analysis of substances present in seized drug samples. The RADIANT™ ASAP is an ambient ionization technique which entails little to no sample preparation to analyze the sample. With this ionization technique, seized samples can be prepared, detected, and identified within minutes. Samples in either solid or liquid form are diluted in a suitable solvent and introduced into the instrument via a glass capillary rod where they are simultaneously ionized at 4 cone voltage to yield immediate M+H data for review. This workshop aims to discuss the training conducted on the RADIANT, how ambient ionization is used for the analysis of seized drugs, and some of the global success stories behind the training.

## **Building Emotional Resiliency for Forensic Professionals: Thriving in High-Stress Environments**

Jennifer Dillon – Wellness & Resiliency Section Commander – Michigan State Police

Forensic professionals operate in high-stakes environments where exposure to trauma, ethical complexity, and emotional intensity is routine. This workshop explores the critical role of emotional resiliency in sustaining well-being and professional effectiveness in such demanding settings. Participants will gain foundational knowledge in emotional literacy – learning to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotional responses as well as those of others. We will examine the concept of emotional labor – the often-invisible effort required to regulate emotions in service of professional roles, and its cumulative impact.

The session will also address the warning signs and consequences of burnout and compassion fatigue, offering practical strategies for prevention and recovery. Importantly, we will highlight the concept of compassion satisfaction – the fulfillment derived from helping others, and how to cultivate it as a protective factor against stress. Through interactive discussions, reflective exercises, and evidence-based tools, this workshop empowers forensic professionals to build resilience, enhance emotional well-being, and foster a healthier workplace culture.

## **Strengthening Resilience Through Constructive Feedback and Healthy Boundaries**

Jennifer Dillon - Wellness & Resiliency Section Commander – Michigan State Police

Forensic professionals are continually exposed to feedback, whether through performance evaluations, peer reviews, or technical assessments of proficiency. While this feedback is essential for maintaining quality and accountability, it can also be emotionally taxing without the tools to process and respond constructively. The ability to set and communicate healthy boundaries is a complementary practice that fosters the psychological safety needed to receive feedback openly and effectively.

This interactive workshop explores how feedback practices and boundary-setting are mutually reinforcing skills that support professional growth, emotional resilience, and healthy team dynamics. Participants will examine the critical role feedback plays in the forensic workplaces, exploring various types, delivery formats, and evidence-based models that promote constructive communication. The session will also address common barriers to receiving feedback, including emotional triggers, and offer strategies to navigate them with self-awareness and professionalism.

In parallel, participants will gain clarity on the concept of boundaries: what they are, what they are not, and how personal values inform appropriate boundary-setting. Through guided exercises and real-world scenarios, attendees will practice communicating boundaries respectfully and effectively, while also developing skills to recognize and honor the boundaries of others.

By integrating these two essential tools, forensic professionals can build more resilient teams, reduce burnout, and foster a culture of mutual respect and accountability.

### **Automated DNA Extraction Strategies for Sexual Assault and Missing Persons Casework**

Sarah Rosenstein – HID Application and Validation Specialist - QIAGEN

Josh Abernathy – HID Senior Technical Sales Manager - QIAGEN

Forensic laboratories are increasingly challenged by complex sample types encountered in both sexual assault and missing persons investigations, where low DNA quantity, degradation, and PCR inhibitors can significantly impact downstream analytical success. This workshop highlights the versatility of the EZ2 Connect Fx automated extraction platform and its role in supporting robust and reliable DNA workflows across diverse forensic applications.

**Part 1: Automated DNA Purification Strategies for Complex Forensic Samples** Part 1 of the workshop will focus on recently implemented EZ2 Connect Fx workflows supported by the DNA Investigator portfolio. This includes the EZ2 DNA Investigator Sep&Prep protocol for automated differential extraction of sexual assault evidence, as well as the DNA Investigator Bone Extra Large Volume and Fired Cartridge Casings (FCC) workflows for challenging skeletal and ballistic samples. Attendees will gain practical insight into how protocol design, chemistry, and automation work together to support effective inhibitor removal and consistent DNA purification, enabling reliable downstream STR and NGS analysis.

**Part 2: Integrated SNP-NGS Strategies for Identification of Highly Degraded Human Remains** Part 2 will present a real-world pilot study from a World War II Missing Persons project conducted in Greece, involving highly compromised skeletal remains. This case study will walk through an integrated QIAGEN workflow incorporating EZ2 Connect Fx extraction, library quality assessment using QIAxcel, and SNP-based analysis on the MiSeq FGx using the ForenSeq Kintelligence workflow. Results from this pilot demonstrate how optimized purification and quality control can enable SNP-NGS analysis in cases where conventional STR-CE methods yield partial or no profiles, supporting extended kinship analysis and identification efforts in historical and missing persons investigations. This workshop is intended for forensic practitioners seeking applied guidance on implementing adaptable extraction strategies, understanding purification performance, and evaluating integrated workflows that expand investigative potential in both sexual assault and missing persons casework.

### **Improving DNA Reporting and Communication: Takeaways from the Human Factors Report**

Jarrah Kennedy – Scientific Program Coordinator – Texas Forensic Science Commission

Melissa Taylor – Senior Forensic Science Research Manager – NIST

In May 2024, after over four years of dedicated work, the NIST Expert Working Group on Human Factors in DNA Interpretation published their final report (<https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.8503>). This report highlights "human factors," a scientific discipline focused on understanding interactions between humans and system elements to mitigate risks and errors. Using a systems approach, the report provides recommendations aimed at enhancing the effective communication of forensic DNA interpretations. This presentation will delve into these recommendations and their justifications, offering tools to improve the reporting and communication of DNA results to end-users during pre-trial and trial testimony. While statistical analyses remain central to DNA interpretation, their conclusions are neither infallible nor definitive. These numerical values *help* to address whether an individual may be a source of DNA but should not serve as the sole basis for investigative or judicial decisions. The recommendations emphasize the need for precise language, accompanied by clear limitations and caveats, to enhance the comprehension of results by end-users. Additionally, the talk will explore a growing challenge in the field: the complexities of communicating the significance of biological results when addressing "how and when" questions related to DNA deposition—or its absence – particularly when these questions are asked during testimony. Attendees will leave with actionable insights to improve the clarity and impact of written and oral communications within the criminal justice system.

### **Steady on the Stand – Effective Expert Testimony**

Lindsay Garner – Senior Managing Attorney - Georgia Bureau of Investigation

Laura McDonald – Legal Director - Georgia Bureau of Investigation

Navigating the courtroom for the first time or the fiftieth time? Testifying as an expert in a trial or Daubert hearing? This interactive workshop is for you.

Testifying demands preparation and the ability to hold steady under pressure. This four-hour, practitioner-focused attorney-led workshop is designed to help forensic scientists testify effectively in the courtroom. Emphasis is placed on practical preparation for testimony, maintaining professionalism, protecting scientific integrity, and common defense strategies and courtroom challenges including proven techniques for answering difficult questions. Participants should be prepared to interact in mock scenarios to observe and practice effective testimony techniques, identify common pitfalls, and learn strategies for working productively with attorneys before and during trial. Designed for working forensic practitioners, this session provides practical tips, lessons learned, and actionable guidance to help experts testify clearly and earn credibility in the courtroom.



# 2026 SAFS ANNUAL MEETING

## Section Breakout Sessions



### **Forensic Biology**

DNA and Firearms, Tarah Nieroda and Marybeth Sciarretta – DNA Labs International

The intersection of DNA and firearms evidence represents a critical point in forensic science, where careful preservation and processing are vital to allow multiple disciplines—biology, firearms examination, and trace analysis—to extract the maximum amount of information from a single item. Proper evidence handling supports the seamless integration of DNA analysis with ballistic comparisons, fingerprint recovery, and other forensic methodologies, ultimately enhancing the overall investigative value of firearm-related evidence.

This presentation will explore key considerations spanning from crime scene collection to laboratory processing. Advanced analytical approaches—such as specialized methods for recovering DNA from fired cartridge cases and strategies for interpreting complex DNA mixtures associated with firearms—will be discussed in detail. Real-world case examples will illustrate how the thoughtful application of these techniques has yielded meaningful investigative results and contributed to successful case resolutions. Finally, the importance of prioritization of different forensic disciplines when processing firearms will be highlighted.

Roundtable discussion of issues encountered in forensic biology casework

### **General Forensics**

Roundtable discussion of issues encountered in casework, QA/QC, etc.

### **Drug Chemistry/Toxicology**

New Emerging Semi-Synthetic Mitragynoids and their Analytical Challenges, Holly Pierzynski – Cayman Chemical

Mitragynine is an indole-based alkaloid and is one of the main psychoactive constituents in the Southeast Asian plant *Mitragyna speciosa*, commonly known as kratom. It is an atypical opioid that is typically consumed as a part of kratom for its pain-relieving and euphoric effects. It has also been researched for its use to potentially manage symptoms of opioid withdrawal and as a treatment for alcohol use disorder (AUD). More recently, analogs of mitragynine have begun to appear in the unregulated consumer marketplace and some are readily available in gas stations and vape shops in products branded as “7-hydroxymitragynine” or “7OH”. The heightened concern is due to studies showing that 7-hydroxy mitragynine and mitragynine pseudoinoxyl (MP, the rearrangement product of 7-hydroxy mitragynine) are more potent opioid agonists, exceeding that of mitragynine on the order of 10x and 100x, respectively. This presentation will highlight new emerging semi-synthetic analogs of mitragynine, such as “7OH”, “MP”, and “MGM-15”, and the analytical challenges they present.

GCMS Low Energy Ionization to Determine Structural Information on Fentanyl and Nitazene Analogs, Kirk Lokits  
– Agilent Technologies GCMS Application Scientist

This work compiles low energy ionization spectra of fentanyl and nitazene analogs to assist in the identification of isobaric spectra generated under 70 eV ionization energy. Low energy ionization spectra of nitazene fentanyl analog standards were generated at 10, 12, 15, and 17 eV ionization energies and optimized for the formation of a molecular ion, molecular ion abundance, and high spectral fidelity (isotopic ratios) of the molecular ion patterns. The spectral patterns were then compared to street drug case samples and identified nitazene analogs and other controlled substances based on the creation of their respective molecular ion and isotopic patterns. The data illustrates the power and ability of the Agilent 7250 QTOF to produce the molecular ions of difficult to identify drugs due to similar or isobaric spectra that do not produce characteristic spectral fragmentation and or a molecular ion under conventional ionization energies of 70 eV.

SWGDRUG/OSAC/ASTM Updates – Melissa Hehir and Lyndsay Cone

Roundtable discussion of issues encountered in drug chemistry/toxicology casework

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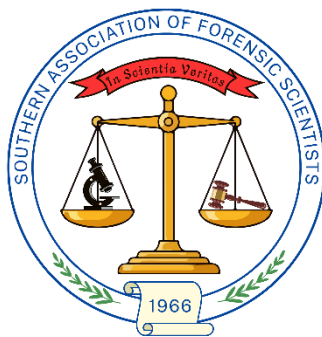


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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF FORENSIC SCIENTISTS

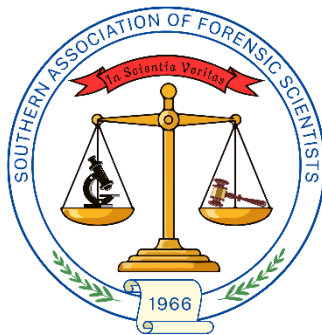
On September 9, 1966, forensic scientists from the southern region of the United States met in Atlanta, Georgia and adopted the first constitution of the organization known as the Southern Association of Forensic Scientists. This was not the first meeting of this group, which had met previously in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Auburn, Alabama. There were 47 original or charter members. As of this writing, there are approximately 300 SAFS members.

SAFS is the oldest of the regional forensic scientist associations apart from the California Association of Criminalistics.

SAFS is an organization of practicing forensic scientists and forensic science college and university educators. There are four types of membership offered: Student Affiliate, Associate Member, Member, and Retired Member. To gain voting membership in SAFS it is essential that a prospective member has given expert testimony in some court of the criminal justice system or has advanced the cause of forensic science in some significant manner. Associate membership allows newer scientists to start participating while they work towards the requirements for regular membership. Regular membership requires attendance at one or more of the annual meetings. Student Affiliate membership is renewable on an annual basis, and the applicant must be engaged in science studies with a forensic science career goal. Membership applications of all types are considered at the Business Meeting of SAFS. The Annual SAFS Training and Business Meeting is held at various locations in the southern region of the United States. Meeting locations are selected about two years in advance.

If you are interested in applying for any of the membership types, please visit [safs1966.org](http://safs1966.org) or use the QR code below:





# SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF FORENSIC SCIENTISTS

## OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

### **Tanja Kopps: President (2025-2026)**

Tanja earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry with a minor in Physics from Armstrong Atlantic State University. In 1999, Tanja began her professional journey as a Forensic Drug Chemist with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). Over the course of her career, she has analyzed approximately 25,000 drug chemistry cases. Her expertise has earned her recognition as a qualified expert in Forensic Drug Chemistry in numerous Superior Courts in Georgia, as well as Federal Court. Certified in Clandestine Laboratory Response, she previously played a key role in training officers and agents, ensuring proper safety procedures in handling drug labs. Additionally, she taught the Marijuana Identification Course to officers within the state. Tanja has been an active member of the Southeastern Association of Forensic Scientists (SAFS) since 2002. In 2014, she was elected Treasurer, a position she held until 2024, when she was nominated as President-Elect. During her time with SAFS, she also served as Social Chair for several Annual Meetings, fostering networking and collaboration within the forensic science community. Currently, Tanja serves as an Assistant Lab Manager at the Coastal Lab, where she oversees the Forensic Biology Section.

### **Rachael Looney: President-Elect (2025-2026)**

Rachael earned her bachelor's degree in forensic science while double minoring in biology and criminal investigations at the University of Tampa. She continued her education with a master's degree in pharmaceutical sciences with a concentration in forensic drug chemistry and a graduate certificate in forensic toxicology from the University of Florida. She began her forensics career at the San Mateo County Sheriff's Forensic Laboratory in California where she was proficient in drug chemistry, blood alcohol analysis, breath alcohol, and crime scene investigations. In 2021, Rachael relocated to North Carolina and currently works for the North Carolina State Crime Lab in Raleigh for the Drug Chemistry section. After attending her first SAFS conference in 2017 as a student, she became a member in 2022 and now serves on the Training Education and Research Committee, the 2026 Annual Meeting Planning committee, and as President-Elect. Rachael lives with her husband and rescue-pup, Arya.

### **Laura Lawrence: Treasurer (2024-2027)**

Laura Lawrence is a Forensic Chemist with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in the Division of Forensic Sciences. After receiving a B.S. in Forensic and Investigative Science and a B.A. in Chemistry from West Virginia University Laura started her career with GBI and has 14 years of experience working drug identification cases for 30 counties in the state of Georgia. Laura is certified through the American Board of Criminalistics and has been

a member of SAFS for nine years and has been serving on the board for six of those years. When not at work Laura enjoys going to the beach and on adventures with her husband and two young children

**Karlie McManaman: Secretary (2024-2027)**

Karlie received her bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology from Olivet College, and her master's degree in forensic science (chemistry) from Michigan State University. She spent the first 10 years of her career at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Headquarters Lab. She held various positions in the GBI's Drug Chemistry section, including Scientist, Technical Leader, and Assistant Manager. She moved back to Michigan in 2022 and now works for the Michigan State Police as Manager of the Seized Drug Unit in the Lansing Lab. She has been a member of SAFS since 2014 and has served on the Board as a Member-at-Large (2016-2020) and now as Secretary (since 2021). She is also a member of CLIC and MAFS, and is ABC certified in Drug Analysis. Karlie lives with her husband and two young sons, who always keep her on her toes.

**Board of Directors**

**April Brown**, Member-at-Large (2024-2026)

**Erin Tracy**, Member-at-Large (2024-2026)

**Collin Shuford**, Member-at-Large (2025-2027)

**Allison Galassie**, Member-at-Large (2025-2027)

**Amanda Venable**, Immediate Past President (2025-2026)

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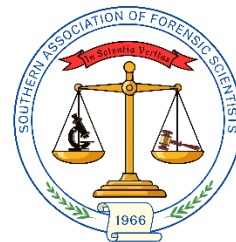


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THANK YOU!!

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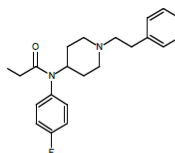
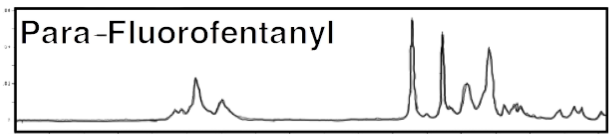
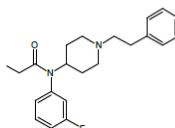
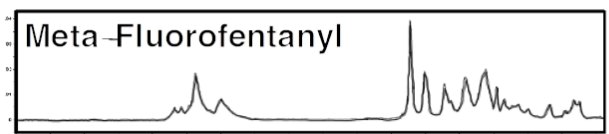
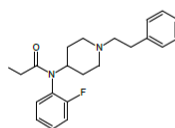
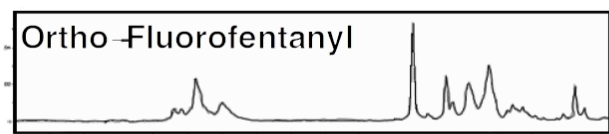
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Finally, we would like to say THANK YOU to everyone who has worked so hard to make this meeting successful. There is not enough room to list each person individually who has had a hand in bringing this meeting to fruition but know that we appreciate and thank each one of you!

North Carolina State Crime Lab and Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Division of Forensic Sciences for allowing us to plan this meeting

Laura Lawrence, SAFS Treasurer, for the support.

Emily Boswell for helping us get biology represented in the workshops!

Larry Sullivan for maintaining and updating the meeting website.

Visit Greenville SC for the bags and informational booklets and for financially supporting us!

Leandra Hopkins with Atrium Hospitality for your patience and assistance in planning.

Joni Adams and Cheryl Schreiner at HelmsBriscoe for all the support. We truly could not have done this without you!

We'd like to express our appreciation to all our plenary speakers and workshop presenters. And again, thank you to our vendors and those who made donations.

2026 Meeting Organizers

Allison, April, Rachael, Collin, and Amanda