

Sports, Arts, & Entertainment

Gov. Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee host 2025 Governor’s Arts Awards recipients; Among honorees are Memphians Deanie Parker and Steve Cropper

NASHVILLE – Governor Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee recognized recipients of the 2025 Tennessee Governor’s Arts Awards, Tennessee’s highest honor in the arts. Since 1971, the Governor’s Arts Awards have celebrated those who have made outstanding contributions to the state’s cultural life.

In an awards ceremony held at the Executive Residence Conservation Hall on October 13, 2025, Governor and First Lady Lee honored 11 recipients with the Tennessee Governor’s Arts Award. The recipients who represent the best in arts and culture in Tennessee join only 259 others who have also received the award over the past 52 years.

“Tennessee has a rich artistic heritage that tells the story of our great state,” Gov. Lee said. “Through their artistry, talents, and traditions, these outstanding recipients make Tennessee a special place to call home. Maria and I congratulate each of them, and we are proud of their accomplishments.”

The recipients come from all walks of life and symbolize the tremendous variety of the arts and culture of Tennessee. The Governor’s Arts Awards were presented in three different categories—Distinguished Artist, Arts Leadership and Folklife Heritage. This year a Lifetime Achievement award was presented for only the third time in the awards history to the Grand Ole Opry.

“The evening was a tribute to the importance of the arts in our communities and the difference the recipients make in the lives of



2025 Tennessee Governor’s Arts Awards recipients with Gov. Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee are shown here at a reception in their honor at the Governor’s Residence. Top Row L to R: Colin Reed (The Grand Ole Opry), Sierra Hull, Cristy Dunn, Helen Turner, Deanie Parker, Shawn Pitts, Anne Brown; Bottom Row L to R: Steve Cropper, Lewis Snyder, First Lady Maria Lee, Governor Bill Lee, Paul Brewster, James "Sparky" Rucker. (Photo/Theresa Montgomery)

people in the state,” said Anne B. Pope, executive director of the Tennessee Arts Commission.

The arts help build stronger communities by enhancing quality of life and the distinctive character of Tennessee places. The 2025 recipients of the Governor’s Arts Awards have each contributed

significantly to defining who we are as a state.

The 2025 Governor’s Arts Awards recipients are:

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
The Grand Ole Opry, Nashville
ARTS LEADERSHIP AWARD
Anne Brown, Nashville

Cristy Dunn, Mountain City
Deanie Parker, Memphis

DISTINGUISHED ARTIST AWARD
Paul Brewster, Knoxville
Steve Cropper, Memphis/Nashville
Sierra Hull, Byrdstown/Nashville

Lewis Snyder, Murfreesboro

FOLKLIFE HERITAGE AWARD
Shawn Pitts, Selmer
James “Sparky” Rucker, Maryville
Helen Turner, Brownsville

Tigers crowned champions at Quail Valley Collegiate

Wang and O’Connor Finish Top Five

VERO BEACH, Fla. October 20, 2025- The University of Memphis men’s golf team finished the weekend on a high-note, claiming first place at the Quail Valley Collegiate while Yixiang Wang and Cian O’Connor finished in the top five for individuals.

Memphis, who finished 28 under par for the tournament, brought in a 281 score for round three today, getting 15 birdies from the team and an eagle from Diego Lourenco on hole three. The 836 final score is the best three-round score for the Tigers since the 2023-24 season when Memphis won the Gulf Coast Collegiate.

Individually, Wang led the team with a share of second place – his third top five finish for the season – after recording a 71 during round three for a 203 finish. Teammate Cian O’Connor was up there with him, finishing tied for fifth place with a 206 final. Wang tied his collegiate best for a three-round score while O’Connor set a new personal best.

Lourenco got in on the eagle action today, hitting hole three in just three strokes to finish the final round with a 67 score and four under par for the tournament. Tobey Kim and Christian Morneau rounded out the group, finishing one and two over par, respectively.

The Tigers will wrap up their fall schedule this coming weekend when they take part in the Steelwood Collegiate Invitational.

Watch for The Mid-South Tribune’s 31st Annual Black History Edition in February 2026, Honoring America’s 250th Anniversary!

Two unreleased songs by late Luke Bell available on Nov. 7 via Thirty Tigers; Proceeds to benefit Luke Bell Memorial Affordable Counseling Program



Photos and portrait by Laura E. Partain

October 17, 2025: Thirty Tigers has released “Don’t Mind If I Do” and “Guitar Man” from Luke Bell’s forthcoming posthumous album The King Is Back, a 28-song collection compiling all of the unreleased recordings that would have been his sophomore album. These two new songs, along with the entire collection that will be released on November 7 via Thirty Tigers, are a reminder of Bell’s timeless catalog, which Rolling Stone once described as “classic honky-tonk with a wink and a yodel that summons the sleeping ghosts of country better than any voodoo spell ever could.” Featuring a laidback, waltzing

guitar strum, “Don’t Mind If I Do” was Bell’s life mantra and is a testament to his loving, always-curious and open-minded nature. His charming disposition is evident in this live performance video, which was self-filmed on his porch outside of his Cody, Wyoming home over a decade ago. Elsewhere, “Guitar Man” grapples with the life of a hard-touring musician in love, as Bell laments over his “lonesome gal from Tennessee.” Watch the “Guitar Man” Visualizer via YouTube Stream “Don’t Mind If I Do” and “Guitar Man”

Pre-order/Pre-save The King Is

Back

About “Don’t Mind If I Do,” Bell’s mother Carol reflects, “Those who knew Luke well know that his code for living was a charming grin, followed by a, ‘Don’t Mind If I Do.’ A family member even suggested this as his epitaph. Many a friend of Luke’s had the experience of opening the door when he showed up unannounced, only to be talked into allowing him to crash your party, your gig or your quiet family night at home. When he visited home, he was often referred to as ‘Hurricane Luke,’ appearing out of the blue, demanding our undivided attention, leaving chaos wherever he

went, and then driving on to his next destination, leaving us all tired and stunned. But no matter how unprepared one was for Luke’s presumptuousness, all he had to do was fix his victim with his twinkle-eyed, charming ‘Don’t Mind If I Do’ smirk, and the door was open.

Alongside the release, Hayes Carll and Chris Acker shared memories of Luke that illustrate his “don’t mind if I do!” ethos. About “Guitar Man,” Carol Bell adds: “Luke was interested in putting his own twist on country while exploring all of its influences: roots country, old time country, and honky tonk. ‘Guitar Man’ feels like a home run at-

tempt at classic old school country, with Bell’s usual exploration of complicated feelings. He worries his lonely Tennessee gal will lose interest while he’s on the road, and he wonders whether or not he’s making the right choice. He seems to be struggling to make sense of his choice to live on the road, away from the woman who is his home.”

The two new songs follow the worker’s anthem “Roofer’s Blues” and the melancholic “Black Crows,” which were released last month. The album’s title track “The King Is Back” arrived in September with an official video assembled by Western

AF’s Mike Vanata featuring footage of Luke and his best friend, his dog Bill, at the historic TE Ranch west of Cody, Wyoming where Luke lived and worked during his musical off-seasons.

Three years ago, the Wyoming-born singer/songwriter tragically passed away at age 32, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most promising new voices in country music. Arriving several years after his passing, The King Is Back keeps his spirit alive. Produced by Andrija Tokic and tracked between 2013 and 2016, the album was assembled by Luke’s mother Carol, along with manager Brian Buchanan, with

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