



## KENTUCKY BOURBON HALL OF FAME® | 2025 CLASS BIOS

*Bios, as provided by each inductee, are below in alphabetical order.*

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**Craig Beam**, 66, Bardstown, Ky. Craig Beam, a seventh-generation distiller, learned the art and science behind crafting great whiskeys under the tutelage of his grandfather, Earl, and father, Parker, both legendary Master Distillers and Bourbon Hall of Fame inductees from Heaven Hill Distillery. Now in his fourth decade, Craig is showcasing his award-winning talents and continuing his legacy as Master Distiller at Jackson Purchase Distillery in Western Kentucky, one of the Commonwealth's fastest-growing contract distillers.



Craig Beam is the culmination of seven generations of the Beam family, a bourbon dynasty steeped in distilling expertise.

Growing up in the heart of Kentucky's bourbon industry, Craig's passion for this craft is both a legacy and a hard-earned achievement. He began his bourbon education at just ten years old, learning from his grandfather Earl—a nephew of Jim Beam and Master Distiller at Heaven Hill for over 30 years, who was inducted into the Bourbon Hall of Fame in 2003. Earl would take Craig to the distillery on weekends, teaching him the critical role of yeast in bourbon making. “The strain of the yeast makes the difference between good whiskey and poor whiskey,” Earl would emphasize, instilling in Craig an appreciation for precision and quality.

Outside the distillery, Craig spent time on the family farm with his father, Parker, who succeeded Earl as Master Distiller in 1975 and was inducted into the Bourbon Hall of Fame in 2001. From an early age, Craig absorbed invaluable knowledge about the corn varieties essential for Heaven Hill's quality bourbon - lessons that would be invaluable when he would later take on responsibility for corn procurement at the distillery.

In 1983, Craig officially joined his father at Heaven Hill, starting from the ground up. He gained hands-on experience in every aspect of distillery operations, from sweeping floors to managing rickhouses and running stills before modern automation took over. This rigorous training honed his skills in making precise head and heart cuts through taste and smell.

Craig worked closely with his father as Master Distiller on the company's flagship brands while also introducing acclaimed new labels, including the Evan Williams and Elijah Craig single barrel series. Under his careful guidance, the Parker's Heritage series—named in honor of his father—and the wheated bourbon Larceny successfully launched, further solidifying the Beam family's legacy in bourbon craftsmanship.

Now Craig brings his vast bourbon making experience to Jackson Purchase Distillery, returning to the Master Distiller role with one of Kentucky's fastest growing distilleries. #



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**The late Mary Dowling, 71, Lawrenceburg, Ky.** An acclaimed symbol of resiliency and pioneering spirit, Mary Dowling was born in 1859 to Irish immigrants and overcame anti-Irish sentiments and gender barriers to become a trailblazing Bourbon entrepreneur, becoming the first woman to run a major distillery in 1903 and audaciously moving production to Mexico during Prohibition. A pillar of her Lawrenceburg, Ky. community and clearly ahead of her time, Dowling built churches, championed immigrant, black and women's rights and opened a free hospital before her death in 1930.



Born in Clark County, Kentucky in 1859 to Irish immigrants who'd escaped the great potato famine, Mary Dowling arrived at the height of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic fervor. The hardscrabble life her family led provided the foundation of grit and determination that would serve her well on her remarkable journey to becoming a pioneering woman whiskey-maker and bourbon entrepreneur, well before women were even allowed to vote.

She married Irish-immigrant John Dowling, a cooper who crafted whiskey barrels from American Oak for many distilleries, including Waterfill & Frazier (KY-26), in 1874. Settling in Lawrenceburg, they purchased a parcel of land on which they greatly expanded the Dowling cooperage. Mary was shrewd and intelligent, with amazing business acumen and an enterprising spirit. By the mid-1880s, amidst ever increasing headwinds of German and Irish Catholic prejudice, she and John had parlayed their cooperage profits into the acquisitions of Waterfill & Frazier and two other distilleries, placing the Dowlings among Lawrenceburg's bourbon dynasties—the Bonds, Lillards, Ripys, and McBrayers. To celebrate their ascendance, Mary oversaw the construction of Dowling Hall on South Main Street, which served as their home, as well as a hub of civic activity. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

When John died in 1903, Mary assumed sole proprietorship of the Dowling empire, becoming the only woman to run a major distillery in the male-dominated Kentucky bourbon industry, though she met stiff resistance from her bank and competitors trying to force her to sell for pennies on the dollar. In short order, Lawrenceburg National Bank cut her line of credit, James Levy and Brothers dropped her distribution, and her cooperage and distillery were each destroyed by fires. Undaunted, she rebuilt the business from scratch, and in 1904, a year of immense productivity and reconstruction, secured a distribution deal with Grommes and Ulrich in Chicago, helped found the fledgling Anderson National Bank, though, as a woman, she was denied a seat on the board, and reopened the Waterfill, Dowling distillery. The widowed mother of eight must have seemed a force of nature to competitors as she scaled the business to new heights. By 1920, she was considered one of the most successful distillery operators in the Commonwealth.

When Prohibition arrived, Mary was not surprised to be denied a medicinal license. She sold some of her



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barrels to licensed distilleries, including Pappy Van Winkle, and retired, lamenting the damage being done to the immigrant communities, the brewers, distillers, and vintners, most harmed by the Volstead Act. In March 1923, she'd feel that acutely as the victim of a government sting after a bootlegger bought a few pint bottles from Mary's youngest son, who was home after graduating Harvard. It was a classic case of trumped-up charges and malicious prosecution by an ambitious DA and teetotaler judge that lasted five years. Outraged by the overreach, Mary devised an audacious plan. If they were going to treat her as if she was in business, she may as well wind things up again.

In 1926, she hired Joe L. Beam and his sons to dismantle Waterfill and relocate it by locomotive to Juarez, Mexico, establishing D&W Distillery. With Joe L. overseeing production, huge quantities of Waterfill & Frazier bourbon were distributed throughout Mexico and South America and served to many American tourists. D&W, renowned for its quality, was a massive success, securing the family's fortune and continuing operations until 1964 when the government mandated that bourbon be produced in the US. The Beam family continues to acknowledge their debt of gratitude to Mary Dowling for ensuring that the Beams maintained generational continuity in the bourbon industry by toasting her memory every year at their family reunions.

Mary passed in 1930 at the age of 71, three years before Prohibition's repeal, but she never lost the courage of her convictions and was a pillar of her community, contributing to the construction of local churches, championing immigrant, black, and women's rights, and opening a free hospital to treat trachoma, a leading cause of blindness at the time, especially among Lawrenceburg's rural poor.

In a time when we need to remind people of the spirit in America's Spirit, of the people and stories that have shaped its enduring, evolving character, we have Mary Dowling, a visionary whiskey entrepreneur who is not simply an ideal example of Kentucky fortitude and the American immigrant dream come true, but a perfect symbol of bourbon's resilience and longevity. #



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**Larry Ebersold, 75, Hebron, Ky.** Larry Ebersold's decades-long career, blending corporate experience at Seagram's with entrepreneurial consulting, has left an indelible mark on the modern Bourbon and rye whiskey industry. A key architect of the craft distillery boom, Ebersold's expertise has shaped facilities for 31 distilleries, including New Riff, Rabbit Hole and Bardstown Bourbon, collaborating with architects and engineers to design innovative production spaces.



Larry Ebersold was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. He graduated from Trinity High School and received a Chemical Engineering degree from the University of Louisville, swimming for the schools' teams as well as for an AAU team.

Larry began his working career in 1972 at the Seagram plant in Louisville, Kentucky as a distillery shift supervisor. After five years of changing responsibilities in various departments, he was transferred to the Seagram plant in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

Larry's first assignment at the Lawrenceburg Indiana plant was managing the by-product recovery portion of the distillery. Over the next five years Larry worked in cooking and fermentation, the engineering department, as superintendent

of the maintenance and utilities department, and then returned to the distillation portion of the distillery. In May of 1983, Larry was promoted to plant distiller and remained in that position for 20 years.

At that time, the Seagram Lawrenceburg Distillery, the largest beverage distillery in the US, was the sole source of Seagram Gin, Seagram Light Whiskey and GNS for US operations. The distillery also produced straight whiskies that were used in Seagram 7 and later in Crown Royal and VO brands.

When Diageo and Pernod Ricard purchased the Seagram Company in December of 2001, Larry's responsibilities expanded beyond the distillery and grain division to include Pernod's barrel inventory, as well as manufacturing planning and sales of bulk whiskies. In 2005, Larry became involved with Wild Turkey plant operations and barrel inventory monitoring. Two years later, plans commenced for an expansion to the Wild Turkey facility to keep up with an increase in demand. Larry participated in the sizing and layout of the present Wild Turkey facility. It's notable that Wild Turkey was the first "green field" plant built in North America since the Seagram Gimli plant in Manitoba, Canada was constructed in 1968.

On December 31, 2009, after 38 ½ years in the industry, Larry retired as Pernod Ricard's Master Distiller.

In January of 2010, Larry organized his own consultancy, Larry Ebersold, LLC, intending to help improve



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existing craft distillery operations. Larry's first client was Wild Turkey, joining the project while the plant was in the beginning stages of startup.

The craft distillery boom was in the early stages and Larry's consulting business grew way beyond anything he had anticipated! He found himself receiving calls from clients of Vendome looking for assistance sizing and designing facilities. Though Larry's original intent was to improve operations in existing facilities, he was now in the construction business working with architect and engineering firms.

In early 2011, Larry added New Riff to his client portfolio, followed by Smooth Ambler, Boone County Distillery, Rabbit Hole Distillery, Firestone and Roberts Distillery, Sagamore Distillery, Bardstown Bourbon Distillery, Castle and Key, Diageo Lebanon Kentucky and 31 others.

Larry has received much satisfaction over his career with Seagram and with the 14 additional "bonus" years as an independent consultant. He's been privileged to have lent a hand in creating many new facilities, while working with entrepreneurial and creative people to produce excellent bourbon and rye whiskies. #



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**Chris Morris**, 67, Louisville, Ky. A 50-year veteran of the Kentucky Bourbon industry, Chris Morris' craftsmanship and integrity is hailed around the world for elevating Brown-Forman's whiskey portfolio and crafting innovative brands such as Woodford Reserve Double Oak and its vaunted Master's Collection. Morris also is one of the industry's most respected historians, a three-time Chairman of the Kentucky Distillers' Association Board of Directors, and a cherished mentor to his successor Elizabeth McCall, all of which has solidified his lasting, lifelong impact on Kentucky Bourbon.



Chris Morris is Master Distiller Emeritus for Woodford Reserve. A Louisville native, he has spent his working life – 50 years in 2026 – in the spirits industry. He is one of the key people responsible for the success of Brown-Forman's award-winning bourbon portfolio, including Old Forester, Woodford Reserve, and King of Kentucky.

Morris grew up around bourbon as he is one of three generations of his family to work at Brown-Forman. His career began in 1976 as a trainee in the central lab working for the Master Distiller. In 1988 he went to work for Glenmore Distilleries Company and joined United Distillers through its acquisition of Glenmore in 1991.

In 1997 he returned to Brown-Forman and was chosen to begin training as Master Distiller, a position he held from 2003-2023. He developed the Woodford Reserve Master's Collection, Double Oaked, Rye and Distillery Series products. In 2015 Morris was given the additional responsibility of Vice President of Whiskey Innovation for Brown-Forman. He was named Master Distiller Emeritus in 2023 when his mentee, Elizabeth McCall, was named Master Distiller.

As a student of the industry, Morris authored the Society of Wine Educator's Certified Spirits Specialist program, introduced the use of taste notes for bourbon in 1992 and developed the Woodford Reserve Flavor Wheel in 2004.

Morris has served on the Kentucky Distillers' Association and Kentucky Bourbon Festival's Board of Directors and as co-chair of the DISCUS Master Distillers Committee. He has also been a judge in IWSC and ISC competitions. #





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**Damon Thayer**, 57, Georgetown, Ky. One of the strongest champions of Kentucky Bourbon in the history of the Kentucky General Assembly, retired Senate Majority Leader Damon Thayer is directly responsible for stewarding more than 20 pieces of legislation that modernized Kentucky's signature industry, propelled its amber nectar into an unprecedented golden age and transformed distilling into an economic and tourism powerhouse for the Commonwealth.



A Kentucky Senator from 2003-2025, Damon spent years championing Bourbon at our state Capitol. Damon is only the eighth legislator ever to receive the 100 Proof Award – and he is the only senator to receive the award four times. The 100 Proof Award is presented by the Kentucky Distillers' Association and it is the highest honor that the Bourbon industry gives to elected officials who promote and protect Kentucky's home spirit. Damon was ALSO inducted into the well-respected Order of the Writ by The Fifteen – a founder's council made up of 15 Bourbon barons and the KDA. A political powerhouse, Damon has received the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's MVP Award eight times for his razor-sharp focus on the growth of Kentucky businesses. He is also a two-time recipient of the Kentucky League of Cities' Big Hitter Award for stepping up to the plate and achieving passage of legislation that will significantly

impact Kentucky cities.

In 2013, Damon took on the mantle of Senate Majority Leader – a role that required him to act on behalf of the entire Republican majority on the Senate floor. He was known for being a constant workhorse for Kentucky voters and was selected as 23rd on a list of the 40 most influential people in the debate to decide the future of U.S. Pensions by *Institutional Investor Magazine*. After 22 years in the state Senate, Damon announced he would not be running for re-election in 2024 so that he could devote more time to the bourbon business. HIS LAST DAY AS A SENATOR WAS DECEMBER 31, 2024.

In his spare time, Damon owns and operates Thayer Communications & Consulting LLC and Half Century Equine Ventures LLC, which acquires interests in racehorse partnerships. His horses race at all Kentucky racetracks, plus tracks in California, Illinois, INDIANA, Florida, LOUISIANA, New Jersey, New York, Ohio AND TEXAS. In 2020, one filly even competed at the prestigious Royal Ascot meeting in England. With such strong Kentucky roots and a personal penchant for the finest Kentucky Bourbon, it was only a matter of time until Damon undertook his own venture into Kentucky's signature Bourbon industry BY CO-FOUNDING KENTUCKY SENATOR SPIRITS LLC WITH ANDRE REGARD IN 2018. #