

# PEOPLE

## Chip Baker, CFEE



Friends of the Festival is a non-profit organization whose primary business is managing the Riverbend Festival, a nine day music festival which operates during the first half of June each year. Riverbend operates in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee, along the waterfront of the Tennessee River. The Riverbend Festival is one of the top festivals in the southeast and will entertain over 600,000 patrons with over 100 musical acts.

In addition, Friends of the Festival (FOF) manages the downtown Chattanooga waterfront for the City of Chattanooga and in July-September offers a free Saturday night concert series called Riverfront Nights.

Also, FOF manages the Chattanooga Classic, one of the PGA Tours Nationwide series golf tournaments in October.

## IN CONVERSATION

### How did you get into events?

The first 17 years of my career, I was a hospital administrator. Ten of those years were in Dallas, Texas. In 1992, my wife and I moved to Chattanooga to manage the Children's Hospital. An Airshow, featuring the Navy Blue Angels, was held just before I arrived in 1992 but continued on every other year. Not only was this a fundraiser for the Children's Hospital I managed but, as a pilot, I truly enjoyed running the Airshow. Thus began a career in event management!

### What has been your biggest professional challenge?

The Riverbend Festival has always been a great event for our region of the country. Unfortunately, like many events, Riverbend had significant financial issues as well as relational issues. The challenge was to take a very good event and give it a complete makeover, financially as well with numerous community relationships. Our team stepped up to the plate and within one year, was well on the road to recovery.

Another challenge was in 2003 when we had to deal with a murder that occurred off the festival site but close enough that the media would use the festival name when describing it. Needless to say, efforts were made in every arena (political, PR, all media) to evaluate what occurred, where it occurred, deal with what occurred, and to move on. It was a challenge that we handled pretty well though it rears its ugly head from time to time.

### What do you do to relax?

I have 4 children and a great wife so we enjoy doing lots of things together like camping, boating and traveling. I also enjoy scuba diving and golfing. Before college tuition saving, I enjoyed flying!

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## FACTS ON FILE

### Years in the Business:

12 Years

### Degree:

Bachelor of Arts in Biology from the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio; Master's in Hospital Administration from the George Washington University, Washington, DC

### Family:

Wife: Karlette; Children: Shea-18, Skyler-16, Sullivan-14, Sophie-11

### Last book read:

*The Blindside*  
by Michael Lewis

### Last business book read:

*Customers for Life*  
by Carl Sewell & Paul B. Brown

### Chip Baker, CFEE

#### Executive Director

#### Friends of the Festival

180 Hamm Rd  
Chattanooga, TN, 37405 USA

Phone: (423) 756-2211

Fax: (423) 756-2719

chip@riverbendfestival.com

riverbendfestival.com

**Other Background Experience**

For the first 17 years of my career, I was a hospital administrator and for the past 12 years have been in event management. At the same time that I changed careers, I was elected to the Hamilton County Board of Education and enjoy representing 34,000 people in District 2. I enjoy serving on many community boards, particularly the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce

**What's the best advice you've ever received?**

I would say there are two. The professional one is that non-profit is a tax status, not a business strategy! The other is from my father who said to always keep your chin up.

**What is your personal philosophy?**

I think it's as simple as, you only go around once in life and, if you do it right, once is enough. Always be kind, patient, and sincere and treat others as you would like to be treated. Oh, and keep your chin up!