

# PEOPLE

## Bob Bryant

Founded in 1957 to connect the community to the iconic Indy 500 race, the 500 Festival is a not-for-profit organization that produces more than 50 life-enriching events and programs that celebrate the spirit and legacy of the Indianapolis 500 and foster positive impact on the city of Indianapolis and state of Indiana. One of the largest festivals in the nation, each year more than half a million people attend an event or program produced by the 500 Festival. Since its founding, the 500 Festival has contributed more than \$400 million in economic value to central Indiana.



### IN CONVERSATION

#### How did you get into the events industry?

Immediately after college graduation I embarked on a unique expedition initiated by HRH Prince Charles to the Australian Outback. After several months working with Aborigines, counting crocodiles, building roads in a new national park and documenting images of 1,000 year-old artwork in the cliffs along the Gregory River.... the idea of doing something exciting and adventurous with the rest of my life came into focus. Upon returning to the US, I happened upon an opportunity to be a regional marketing director for Feld Entertainment, promoting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and Walt Disney's World On Ice touring shows. Since then, all my days have been circus days!

#### What has been your biggest professional challenge?

On the personal front, I'd say keeping fresh and interested in the work at hand and keeping any sense of boredom at bay has been a consistent challenge. Not every day is aborigines and elephants, but you need to stay excited about what you are doing and your role in the mission. Developing a team environment where everyone keeps the creative fires burning is a great way to stay personally motivated. In a similar way on the organization front, I think any line of business

needs to stay focused on being forever interesting, relevant and motivated to make a difference daily. I have been a part of organizations that shift from dynamic and entrepreneurial in spirit to a focus on managing a mature business. I think that is a slippery slope and a danger for any company. The moment you start thinking you've arrived and it's time to sit back and coast is all too often the start of a decline in production, revenues, relevance or worse.

#### What do you do to relax?

In the short term, I try to read at least 15 minutes of scripture daily and find time for little moments of reflection, prayer and fun times with family. For the long haul as a family we like to make sure we plan trips or vacation times that include complete unplugging of all devices! Sports, golf, hiking, playing ball with kids... anything you do without knowing where your phone is.

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

A good friend and former pastor at the Naval Academy and Chaplain of the Marine Corps told me that as a believer with full knowledge of what awaits in Heaven, the end of life should be a race to the finish. Since we don't know the timing of the end, we need to live each day with that spirit. I also have

### FACTS ON FILE

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cemented in my memory a quote from Ken Burns' documentary of WWII by a former Army ranger who was dug into a shallow fox hole in the frozen woods during the Battle of the Bulge. After days of indiscriminate shelling and moving fox holes he awoke to find a young teenage soldier who had just been sent to the front trying to commit suicide, the seasoned veteran knocked the weapon out of his hands and simply said, "Hell man, think positive." The genuine and heartfelt sentiment of that veteran telling that story and still in his late years being diligent in his simplistic and profound belief in staying positive is etched in my mind. In the event world, we often get a bit dramatic and deal with unforeseen circumstances... but we can sure think positive if that guy could!

#### What is your personal philosophy?

Heck man, think positive.