



knoxville chapter
connecting financial executives

Winter 2024-2025 NEWSLETTER



Message from the President

Hello FEI Community!

As we begin a new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the tremendous strength and potential of our FEI community. We are fortunate to be part of an organization that thrives on the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of its members. Every day, FEI professionals are shaping industries, advancing innovation, and setting standards for financial excellence. But the power of FEI is not just in the experience of those who have already joined, it's also in the potential of those who are yet to become part of our group.

I'd like to encourage your involvement in expanding the FEI community. If you know a colleague or peer who could benefit from the invaluable resources, connections, and learning opportunities that FEI provides, I invite you to share the opportunity of membership with them.

At FEI, we're more than just a network—we are a community of leaders dedicated to advancing the profession and supporting one another. Whether through educational programming, industry insights, or the valuable relationships formed within our network, we are here to help each other succeed.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our organization and for helping us drive FEI's membership growth. Here's to a year of new opportunities, fresh connections, and continued success.

Jennifer Sheley
President, Knoxville Chapter
CFO, tenhats
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If a Member and/or Partner would like to contribute to an upcoming FEI Newsletter, please email Debbie Carper at debbiecarper@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

View all events and register [here](#).

Winter/Spring Events

- **Thursday, March 27th**
FEI CPE Event
Bridgewater Place, 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- **Tuesday, May 13th**
Top Golf
Save the Date

2024 Winter/Spring Chapter Meetings

All events held from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. at Bridgewater Place unless noted.

- **Tuesday, February 18th**
Special Agent Mark Miller
An Evening with the FBI
- **Tuesday, March 11th**
Justin Cazana, Avison Young
Knoxville's Commercial and Residential Real Estate Update

Partner Spotlight: The Baldwin Group



The Baldwin Group, formerly Trinity Benefits Advisors, is an award-winning, entrepreneur-led advisory firm delivering insurance, risk mitigation, employee benefits, and wealth management solutions for businesses and individuals. In June 2024, Trinity Benefit Advisors, a Baldwin Risk Partner, announced their rebrand to The Baldwin Group, the 16th largest insurance agency in the nation, and one of a few publicly traded on NASDAQ. Through the initial relationship with Jackson Vaughan, the Baldwin Group has been a long-time partner of the Knoxville FEI Chapter. Since Trinity's founding nearly 20 years ago as an employee benefits advisor firm, the firm remains committed to investing in the local Knoxville Community.

FEI recently spoke with Jackson Vaughan, CIC, to discuss the benefits of the partnership and participation with the Knoxville FEI Chapter.

What piqued The Baldwin Group's interest and continued Partnership with FEI?

When we think about FEI, we see the premier local group of finance leaders. At The Baldwin Group, we recognize the unique value FEI brings to the local finance community with networking and continuing education, and it's an easy decision to direct our time and resources to such an outstanding group. We appreciate the opportunity to expand our branding and relationship building, ultimately empowering impact drivers with key financial insights and benchmarking. After 15 years personally, there are many friends in the room that have supported various seasons of life both personal and professional.

What sets you apart from other competitors in Knoxville?

We are the best insurance folks in Knoxville driven by (1) our people, (2) our proprietary technology, and (3) our creative ideas delivering results that simplify insurance. We can deliver large corporation services and analytics to mainstream East Tennessee businesses, creating incredible value.

What events or offerings do you look forward to throughout the FEI year?

"I love the opportunity to present during the CPE events and share stories from the trenches of the insurance/claims business. I also love the questions from the attendees and discussions as we gain additional insights into what is important to our community financial leaders. Additionally, the economics update with Marianne Wanamaker is outstanding and who doesn't love the annual Christmas Event! I was encouraged this past December to bring back the red velvet vest."

What is your message to other potential FEI members within your client base and/or the Knoxville area to encourage participation?

If you value your professional brand in the local community, join FEI. The programming is great, and the stories gained from the speakers and networking will pay dividends to your relationships at work, at home, and your other community involvements. Your "FEI time" enhances you and Knoxville!

Knoxville FEI Chapter's success reflects the diverse combination of skills and talents of our Partners and Members. We look forward to sharing more of these stories with everyone in future newsletters.

Member Spotlight: Allen Grady



Allen Grady is a long-time FEI Knoxville Chapter member and former Board member. Allen is the Chief Financial Officer for Buddy's bar-b-q, founded in Knoxville in 1972 by Buddy and LaMuriel Smothers and currently a 3rd generation family-owned business. Allen has been CFO since 2010. Buddy's expanded rapidly after being the only American Barbeque and Budweiser beer offering during the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville and, since that time, has established itself as a high quality, high value, go-to Barbeque source in the region. Buddy's has subsequently franchised locations in the surrounding area and has plans to continue to expand all the while being true to its foundation of providing great quality value barbeque to the families it serves.

How did you get involved with FEI Knoxville?

My good friend and mentor, Frank Southall invited me to a meeting, and I immediately was impressed by the networking - particularly the value of the relationship between the members and the partners. As a result, my next meeting was at an FEI sponsored CFO of the Year event. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, hearing the stories of other CFO's and decided that I wanted to be a part of it. The partners and members are wonderful individuals who share mutual respect.

What is your favorite FEI event or activity?

"The FEI Christmas Event is always a highlight, but I particularly look forward to Marianne Wanamaker's Economic Update every year." Allen noted that he really enjoys the networking, conversations and connections he has made with other Knoxville accounting/finance professionals through FEI. He feels FEI is a group overflowing with experts and mentors and his appreciation for them has grown over the years.

What would you say to others involved in FEI Knoxville that you have gained from your participation?

"I highly encourage others to get involved - volunteer to be on the Board, invest in relationships, and connect with people. Take the opportunity to expand your network with both members and partners."

What are some of your favorite hobbies?

"I love getting out on the lake and boat during the summers with my family. Music and of course, all things related to UT Football and UT sports in general!" Having worked in the restaurant industry his entire career, Allen is a self-proclaimed "foodie" as well!

Interested in additional CPE credit opportunities?

Be sure to visit the FEI Knoxville Webpage [here](#) for CPE offerings from our talented Chapter Partners.

FEI National also provides professional development solutions for financial executives. Take your learning path to the next level, with continuing professional education credit opportunities through in-person courses and conferences, webinars, and on-demand learning.

CONFERENCES

WEBINARS

RESEARCH

Looking for customized, on-site programs to further your accounting and finance team's careers? If so, FEI INSIDE can help by creating a culture of professional growth and change.

To learn more contact inside@financialexecutives.org.

THANK YOU TO OUR CHAPTER PARTNERS



Introducing **FEIconnect**, a private online community

created exclusively for FEI members to connect, learn and share online!

Join the conversation at
connect.financialexecutives.org

