

Pebble Beach man named chair of Festival Napa Valley



Robin Baggett and his wife Michelle Baggett (Robert McClenahan — Special to the Herald)

By [BARBARA ROSE SHULER](#) |

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NAPA — Monterey County native son Robin Baggett donates his entrepreneurial and fundraising skills to nonprofits here and in Napa wine country, where he was recently named board chairman of Festival Napa Valley. The appointment comes after 10 years of helping this Festival mature financially and artistically into a July event that

celebrates music, food, wine and the pleasures of gathering in the fabled California setting.

“I am honored to work with one of the nation’s most admired festivals,” he says, “and look forward to advancing the impact of its many arts education initiatives and helping to take its exceptional programming to even greater heights.”

Baggett, who lives with his wife Michelle in Pebble Beach, joined the Board of Festival Napa Valley in 2013 to work with prominent vintners and local leaders to give the event an important financial and organizational boost.

He describes himself as having a life of three separate and strong focuses. Born and raised in Salinas, he grew up as an athlete playing football, basketball, baseball and other sports. After high school, he went to Cal Poly on a baseball scholarship.

“I was sure I was going to be a professional baseball player until my father and his attorney (also a mentor of Baggett’s) decided, ‘No, you’re going to law school!’ So the second part of my life was as a lawyer in a good career.” His wide-ranging experience as an attorney includes eight years as general counsel of the NBA’s Golden State Warriors.

Baggett developed an interest in grape growing in the 1980s and slowly evolved, as he puts it, from practicing law to producing wine. “I put my 40 years into law and that was enough. I’m a country boy at heart. So I went inactive in 2006 and am full-time in the wine business now.”

He started the Alpha Omega Winery from grapes that originated in Napa. He also has a winery in Spain called Perinet. These days he is meeting the challenges of COVID, working to keep his wineries open as the virus continues its capricious behavior.

In addition to his love for the Napa festival, Baggett has served as past chair of the Napa Valley Vintners Association and in a few years will be the chair of the Wine Institute Board. He also serves on the board of the Land Trust of Napa County and Cal Poly Athletic Director’s Council.

In our region, he is especially proud of the accomplishments of First Tee–Monterey County in Salinas, a nonprofit organization that works with thousands of kids introducing them to golf and life skills lessons. “It’s been a super successful program,” he says.

“Besides my wineries, my life now is basically giving back, being part of nonprofits and trying to make the world a better place than I found it. And I dearly love the Festival!”

Baggett laughs when he confesses that, though he grew up in a family connected to the arts, he has no personal talents in this area. He is, however, an arts appreciator

who is skilled at raising money for good causes, with a special eye for helping young people thrive. Festival Napa Valley, thanks in part to his participation, has dramatically expanded its arts education programs for school-age youth and emerging young professional artists.

“We developed academies during the summer that keep growing,” he says. The talented young people selected for opportunities to be mentored by the Festival’s world-class vocalists and instrumentalists arrive before the 10-day event and in many cases will perform on stage in the Festival itself. There is also a new conducting fellowship. For the younger ones, the Festival sponsors music camps throughout the region serving thousands of children, as well as a program that provides live concerts for kids free of charge in a professional performance setting.

The Festival also invests in arts in the schools and even sponsors a poetry contest for high school students, which awards scholarship money to the winners. All of this is generously supported by the vintners and community leaders in the region.

More than 200 artists, wineries, resorts, theaters, restaurants, chefs, and winemakers take part in what has become known in Napa as “The Ten Best Days of Summer.” The long list of world-class artists who have appeared over the years includes classical music greats like violinists Pinchas Zukerman and Joshua Bell, opera singers Kathleen Battle, Renee Fleming and David Daniel, the Emerson String Quartet, Philharmonia Baroque and dancers from the American Ballet Theatre and the San Francisco Ballet. Also featured are well-known actors, composers, and contemporary singers, including Jennifer Hudson and Patti LuPone.

For more information about Festival Napa Valley see www.festivalnapavalley.org or call 707-346-5052.

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