

Fueling Futures: The Chris Walker Fund



Chris Walker

Chris Walker didn't just believe in professional growth—he lived it. As Vice President of Business Development at GreatAmerica Financial Services and a dedicated member of the NEFA board, Chris was known for his generosity, sharp mind, and fierce commitment to mentorship. Whether guiding young professionals or rallying peers to share their knowledge, he saw education not as a ladder but as a bridge—one that everyone deserved a chance to cross.

Many would say Chris was a lifelong rocker first, and a finance professional second—and that spirit, full of rhythm, passion, and generosity, followed him into every boardroom and breakout session. Whether he was mentoring a newcomer or rallying a crowd at a conference, Chris had a way of lighting up a room. “Chris didn't just inspire people—he made them feel seen, included, and capable,” one colleague shared.

Following his passing in 2011, NEFA members—still reeling from the loss of a cherished friend, leader, and soul of the community—came together to honor him in the most fitting way possible. The result was the creation of the Chris Walker Education Fund: a living tribute that channels his spirit into scholarships, learning opportunities, and mentorship. More than a memorial, it's a movement—one that continues to shape careers and strengthen the industry Chris loved with his whole heart.



A Legacy Rooted in Purpose

The Chris Walker Fund was never just about remembering. It was about continuing a mission, a mindset, and a movement. Through the vision of leaders like Randy Haug, who co-founded the Fund and has long championed education across the industry, the fund became a lasting vehicle for professional growth. Randy’s leadership helped ensure that Chris’s spirit of mentorship would live on through accessible education for countless professionals.

“Chris believed in lifting others through education,” Randy recalled. “He gave freely of time, knowledge, and heart—and this fund ensures his commitment to mentorship lives on.”

Since its founding, the fund has awarded over \$100,000 in grants, helping countless professionals advance their knowledge, confidence, and leadership capacity. It’s not uncommon to see today’s industry leaders trace part of their journey back to the boost they received through Chris’s legacy.



A Chris Walker Fund recipient celebrates earning their CLFP design-

Recognizing the Spirit of Service

In 2012, NEFA renamed its annual Member of the Year award the Chris Walker Memorial Member of the Year Award—a heartfelt tribute to a man whose spirit still echoes through the association halls. The award honors members who embody Chris’s quiet humility, unwavering volunteerism, and deep commitment to lifting others.

"Chris believed in the power of giving back," recalled John Rosenlund, a past NEFA President. "This award isn't just about service—it's about Chris's presence in our lives and work. He made us all better."

The award carries more than recognition for many recipients—it holds meaning. To be linked to Chris's legacy is to be seen not just for what you've done, but for how you've done it—with heart, generosity, and a belief in the better angels of this profession.

The Power of Shared Growth



The fund is sustained by the same spirit of community that defined Chris’s approach to life. NEFA members rally around it at conferences through silent auctions, raffles, and individual donations. Corporate sponsors and longtime members regularly support educational access in his name.

Many first-time donors have shared that hearing stories about Chris at NEFA events moved them deeply and made them want to be part of something lasting. His name, impact, and the warmth others spoke of him created a sense of belonging and purpose. "When we contribute to this fund," one member noted, "we’re not just supporting individuals—we’re strengthening the entire industry's future."

That ripple effect—one person’s spirit inspiring many—keeps the Chris Walker Education Fund alive and growing, year after year.

The Ripple Effect

More than a decade after its launch, the Chris Walker Fund is doing more than supporting professionals—it’s inspiring them. Many recipients have gone on to become leaders, mentors, and active contributors to NEFA’s success. The fund’s reach can now be felt in every corner of the association—through the knowledge shared, the values upheld, and the careers ignited.



“Thank you for believing in me.”

CLFPs and NEFA leaders impacted by the Chris Walker Fund

More Than a Fund—A Cultural Legacy

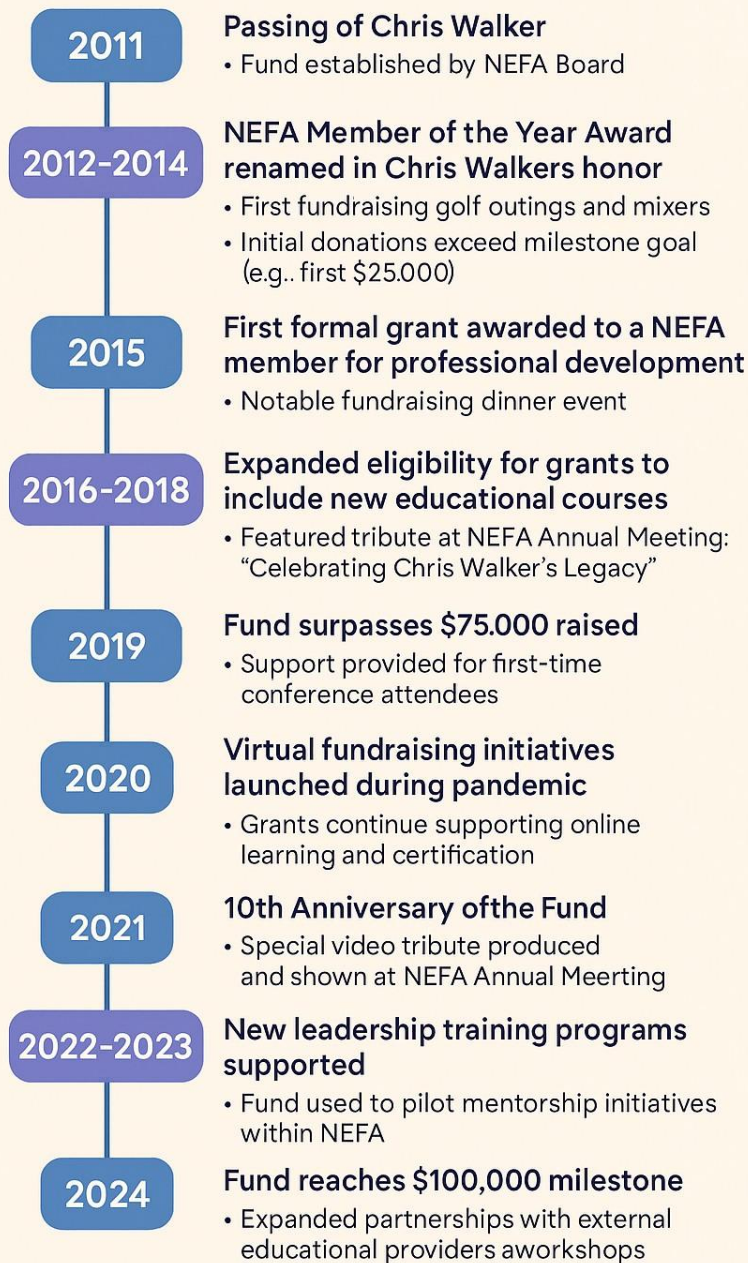
The Chris Walker Fund is more than a program—it’s a cornerstone of NEFA’s culture. It reflects the association’s lasting commitment to education, mentorship, and community, keeping Chris’s values at the heart of its mission. As the industry evolves, the Fund ensures NEFA never strays from what makes it thrive: people helping people grow.

From Cedar Rapids to Santa Barbara, and every NEFA gathering in between, Chris’s spirit lingers. At the 2011 “Chris Walker Lovefest,” more than 400 people gathered to celebrate him with music, laughter, and gratitude. He took the stage with his band, Abandoned Road, beneath a marquee bearing his name. “We were met by true love,” his family wrote. “In the moment’s sweetness, we caught a glimpse of God.”

NEFA continues to encourage members to:

- **Apply for a Grant** – Elevate your career through education.
- **Contribute** – Support the next wave of industry leaders.
- **Nominate a Member** – Celebrate those who carry Chris’s legacy forward.

Chris Walker Timeline



To learn more, visit the NEFA website or contact the NEFA leadership team.

Because every time someone reaches for more, thanks to the Chris Walker Fund, Chris continues to mentor, give, and lead.