



Fresno Chaffee Zoo GM Chris Schiefer: Have Passport, Will Travel

A favorite quote

“If the world is a book and you didn’t travel you would only read the first page.”

St. Augustine



Recently back from a trip with his family to Amsterdam, Brussels, Barcelona and Paris, Chris said he was passionate about travel. He likes to travel off the beaten path to see things few people see.

His passport is filled with stamps from exotic locales, such as Belize and Costa Rica. However, Chris doesn’t need to use his passport for his many camping and hiking trips. As one of the thousands of hikers who reach the top of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park each year by following an 8½-mile trail from the valley floor. Chris said it was the hardest physical activity that he has done, but he did it because few people have done it.

Chris’ biggest personal accomplishment is the eight-day backpack trip to the top of Mount Whitney, the highest summit in the contiguous United States with an elevation of 14,505 feet. Chris shared that the last day was physically and mentally challenging. “It took me down,” he said. “It was completely draining. We

started at five in the morning to hike the 22 miles and finished around six in the evening. On a hike like this, you do a lot of reflecting on how you have treated people, things you have said,” Chris explained.

It’s no surprise that Chris is so outdoor oriented, as it all started as a child when he would hop on his bike and disappear in the streets and surrounding areas of Fresno for hours — coming home in time for dinner with his mom and one brother and three sisters. He’s the baby of the family.

The self-described quiet, shy Chris was born and raised in the fifth largest city in California — Fresno, which he describes as big small city that is close to lots of places,

such as Yosemite National Park, Kings Canyon, the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco. He has never lived anywhere else. When it’s not smoggy, the outdoor enthusiast enjoys views of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, which is home to three national parks, 20 wilderness areas and two national monuments — and Chris’ playground.

The #1 passion in his life is his 12-year-old son, Michael. “He’s my world,” he said. His wife, Donna, is a close second. She is also a Fresno native. Like Chris, Donna and Michael enjoy traveling. Donna has even established a travel club at her high school where she teaches science. Club members plan and hold fundraisers to pay for Yosemite National Park camping trips and fun, yet edu-



The Schiefer family are masters at carving sand sculptures.

Chris did what?

✓ *Chris' big brother talked him into playing circus. He had Chris stand against a barn and then threw darts at him. Unfortunately one hit Chris below his eye.*

✓ *Another time his brother coaxed Chris to jump off the carport roof while holding an umbrella, just like Mary Poppins. He told Chris that this nanny was a real person, and if she was able to do it, Chris could too. Chris ended up with two sprained ankles.*

✓ *While on a day trip in Belize during a cruise in the Caribbean, Chris and his wife went diving while their young son stayed on board in the ship's daycare facility. However, they didn't realize the dive trip required a short airplane trip to Ambergris Caye. They did only one of two scheduled dives because they decided to catch an earlier plane back to Belize City and their ship, which was a good thing because the plane they were originally scheduled on didn't leave the Caye. They risked missing the ship's departure with their son on board as the floating hotel doesn't wait for stragglers.*

cational expeditions to Hawaii, Costa Rica, Australia and other exotic locales.

Chris wants to take his family to Bali and many of the other 17,508 Indonesian islands. He explained that in 20 years, these islands may not be there due to global warming, which is increasing the level of the ocean. "I would love to see those islands before I die," he added.

The family's philosophy is simple, "if you don't travel, life would be bland."

A retail background

Chris has worked in retail since he was 18 years old. His previous jobs included managing sporting goods, clothing and big box stores. However, he describes his current job as the General Manager at the Chaffee Fresno Zoo as ideal as it allows him to spend time with his son and wife. He can now tuck his son into bed at night, as well as attend his son's football games and karate classes. He also finds time to brew his own beer. He claims he's a beer snob.

Chris shared that his ideal job would be an artist. He used to sculpt; now he adds artistic elements to his house and garden as well as captains a sand



Chris' biggest personal accomplishment was his hike to the top of Mount Whitney.

sculpture team. They recently won the grand prize award in the fourth of July sand sculpture contest in Cayucos on the central coast of California. Previously, they won first place for two years in a row. The award-winning sculptures featured an archeological dig featuring a t-rex skeleton; other designs included alligators, squids, snakes and a pharaoh's tomb.

His first job was as a paper boy. "I was awful. I was terrible. I'd deliver about 50 papers and get bored, then stop," he said. His work ethic has come a long way from those days. Today, he prides himself on being fair and very giving while looking out for the best interests of his employees as well as analyzing business operations to improve

efficiency and the bottom line. "I want my employees to have a good experience at work," Chris added.

It may be surprising that Chris describes himself as reserved person who only says things when it is important, yet he likes the sarcastic and biting commentary of *The Soup*, a weekly television series, and the satirical humor of the Monty Python characters.

When Chris retires, he wants to go to the Caribbean, sail boats and listen to Jimmy Buffet. Another retirement dream involves moving to a foreign country and helping build a school or making a village beautiful while his wife teaches English. "I want get away from what I've been doing for 30 plus years," he said.